

SOME HOPE AND SOME DESPAIR

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SUSIE IBARRA - METRO YOUTH - ZOUNDS

SOME HOPE AND SOME DESPAIR 5

It's been about a year between issues for anyone counting. As many of you may know, I've had some problems over the past year, which has made this zine sort of a low priority. Add that to the fact that J Church is once again a functioning band, recording and touring... I just hope it won't be another year before the next issue. For those of you who don't know, here's a little run down of the ups and downs of my past year.

First of all, there was the fire. Last summer, I was sitting at home playing around on my four track with the headphones on. I kept hearing pounding from the neighbors downstairs. I just thought they were being noisy. They were college kids, so ya gotta expect that. Anyway, I finally look up and notice sparks flashing by my window. For the first time, I noticed a burning smell in the air.

Keep in mind, it was a Texas summer so I had my windows closed and the AC pumping, so I hadn't noticed the smell or the ruckus outside. I went over to the balcony and for the first time noticed that a group of 100 or so people were gathered on the sidewalk.

Then I noticed the smoke billowing from around the corner. I leaned over to have a look and saw that the stairwell to my apartment, as well as three other units, was engulfed in flames. I yelled to the people on the street asking if I would be able to make it down the stairs. They all yelled back "no". But I decided to see for myself. I opened my front door only to be met with a wall of smoke and flames. I couldn't even see the floor an inch in front of me.

I closed the door and grabbed my shoes. It was all adrenaline and instinct as I threw my Vans out the window (I knew I couldn't climb wearing them) and scaled down the side of the building. Looking back, I really don't know how I did that. As most of you know, I'm not really in great shape or anything and we were living on the third floor. I was sort of in shock and next thing I knew I was landing in the grass.

I borrowed a spectators cell phone and put a call out to my friends Jenn and Kelly who are pretty much the two people I know I can rely on when Liberty is out of town (she was in China at the time). They came down, and together we watched as my whole apartment went up in flames. Yup, 10,000 records up in flames. Who knows how many posters and flyers. Several computers. All of my stereo stuff including a CD burner, CD player, tape deck, turntables, amp, etc. DAT machine. Four track. All of my clothes. All of Liberty's school books. The entire first pressing of the Storm the Tower 7". Miraculously, my guitars sorta survived. A year later I'm still in the process of replacing things.

But the curse continued as some friends tried to organize a benefit concert at Emo's. Storm the Tower, the Rise and Those Peabody's all played and I owe them a huge thanx.

With all the stress, my heart condition went haywire. The night of the show, when I should have been at my own benefit, I wound up in the hospital under supervision of the cardiology unit on the verge of a heart attack or stroke. To make matters worse, that night, the Rise were robbed and lost some \$20,000 worth of musical gear.

I've spent most of the past year trying to replace things for the label and the band. I've got my basic gear back in working order and Liberty was able to get many of her school books back. My heart condition, well, it's never really great and who really knows what it all means. But I'm stable and that's the main thing.

As I finish this intro, J Church are getting ready to hit the road again. I'll try to be quicker in pumping out the next issue... That assuming that I don't vanish into the "Brazil"-like primordial ooze of Friendster... I also hope to revive the website as soon as I have a little extra cash and time.

This may seem ridiculous, but I'm ending this with a list of some of the things I'm still trying to replace. If you can help with any of this stuff, I'd greatly appreciate it.

Lance

Stuff we still need to replace:

- CD player
- CD burner
- DAT recorder
- Tape to Tape
- Cassette 4 track
- Practice amp
- Electric Mistress
- Volume Pedal
- Rat Pedal
- Tube Screamer
- Small Stone
- Graphic EQ
- Digital Delay
- Compressor
- Melodica
- Drum machine
- Bass
- Acoustic guitar

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LOVE WILL TEAR US APART

When the routine bites hard

And ambitions are low

And the resentment rides high

But emotions won't grow

And we're changing our ways,

Taking different roads

Then love, love will tear us apart again

Why is the bedroom so cold?

Turned away on your side?

Is my timing that flawed?

Our respect run so dry?

Yet there's still this appeal

That we've kept through our lives

Love, love will tear us apart again

Do you cry out in your sleep?

All my failings expose?

Get a taste in my mouth

As desperation takes hold

Is it something so good?

Just can't function no more?

When love, love will tear us apart again

DREAMS OF HAWAII

DREAMS OF HAWAII

I just got added to an e-group of nothing but old Hawaii punk rockers. Everyone on the list is from the old hardcore scene of the early '80s. It's funny and weird at the same time. On the one hand, I'm overwhelmed by waves of sentimentality and nostalgia for those days. On the other hand, it kind of freaks me out to be communicating on a friendly level with people I used to be scared of and thought were gonna kick my ass for being a poseur.

Anyway, I made a couple of recollections into go nowhere stories. I thought you might be interested in what I wrote... I wouldn't blame you if you weren't...

KELLY AND STACY HAHN

I met Kelly who would later wind up in the Fallout around 1980 or '81. It's laughable now, but I was so totally desperate to meet other punks back then, I would put on my little costume and walk around Waikiki, Ala Moana and other malls just hoping someone would come up to me and say anything. Of course, 99% of the time I was approached by haole pedophiles which strangely seems a lot creepier today than it did when I was 14... Anyway, that's basically how I met Kelly. He was in the same boat and we would share issues of Flipside and talk about how we had been playing the first Saccharine Trust record at the wrong speed for a month before we noticed it was a 45. We just thought it was 'heavy, man'.

Needless to say, we had to start a band. We both had very, very, very rudimentary guitar skills (I still do) and no amplifiers. But we thought we were badass and thought we were already in a band and spent most of our time thinking up names and logos and stuff.

In the same way that I met Kelly, I soon met Stacy Hahn.

I have to stop for a moment to say that this story is so vague and convoluted; I really hope I'm not embarrassing either of them. This is supposed to be MY embarrassing memory. I mean, they probably don't even remember this at all... I should also mention now that this story has no punch line and really doesn't go anywhere...

Anyway, I see this cute punk girl and decide I need to talk to her. No ulterior motives. I just wanted to meet anyone punk. It became quickly obvious to me that she needed to be in the band. So I asked her if she wanted to be in a punk band. She said "yeah" and we exchanged numbers

and we set up a meeting.

The day we met was one of my most embarrassing memories of all time. I mean, nothing happened. Her Dad dropped her off at the McDonald's near Kahala Mall. Me and Kelly went there. We all got like Fillet O Fish sandwiches or something and just sat there. Nobody said anything! We just sat there. We ate our food. Then we got up and went our separate ways. Our band lasted for the length of time it took to consume a Happy Meal!

I just thought this story was worth mentioning for a few reasons. First of all, most of the bands I get credited to having been in back in Hawaii were barely more serious than this one.

Having said that, that event is as big a memory to me as any number of events that happened to me in so-called "real bands". I don't remember playing with Metallica and Bush at the Reading Festival. But I remember feeling totally humiliated and not being able to taste my Fillet O Fish back in the early '80s!

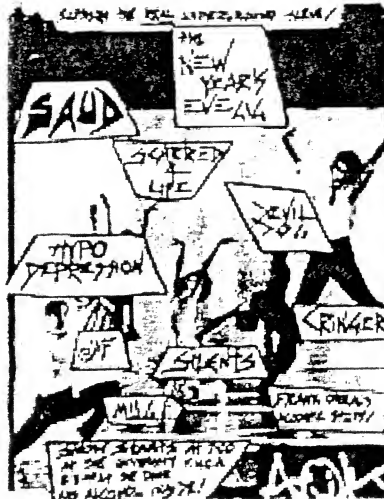
... And then of course I became a vegan communist whatever...

WHY I'M AFRAID OF PUNK GIRLS

The '80s were a really weird time for me. The world seemed like such a shitty place and Hawaii didn't even seem to be good enough to count as part of the world. Keep in mind, I was a punk rock kid living in Nanakuli* and going to Kamehameha*. The "moke/ass-kicking"*** ratio was much more accute in my world. Especially when I showed up for ROTC (it used to be required at Kamehameha) with a mohawk. So, in that world, I considered myself to be a brave motherfucker. I could take a beating from a moke and it was cool. They only hassled me for so long before they realized they'd rather copy my homework...

But in the punk rock world where I should have felt most comfortable, I felt totally terrified. I don't wanna get into the race thing because I certainly haven't gotten it all figured out. But I will say that I was pretty fucking nervous about hanging out with a bunch of white kids. On the extremely rare trip I'd make to 3Ds, I'd be much more nervous there than on the 51 bus from Waianae. I know that sounds stupid seeing as I'm mostly Asian and there were plenty of Asians in the, uh, "scene". But that just isn't how I related to it...

Of course, I was also a total poseur. I liked punk rock



because as a kid I was obsessed with Creem magazine and Song Hits and Hit Parader and eventually Trouser Press. Then I started to dress like a punk and act like one and I was a total failure. So that was just one more reason to be terrified: the fear of being "found out".

Anyway, through playing in Scarred For Life and then Cringer and then a billion other bands, I found my niche and social group and it was cool. The threat of violence seemed like an illusion.

I eventually started helping out the Krolls and Francis and some other folks doing shows at the Manoa Y. There were always hassles and I was all peace-punky and indignant about it all. Then one day the fear all came back...

There was a scuffle outside of the Y between a few girls. Most people were just standing around watching and laughing. One guy was actually taking pictures of the girl's underwear when their skirts rode up during the fight. So like some retard - canto - Billy Jack, I walk up there like I'm gonna be able to stop the fight by myself and immediately get decked in the face by Bronsi (who I don't know) and on the head by Lani (who I did). They weren't even trying to hit me, but my head was spinning for a little while. Nothing against those two, I was just a stupid person at a stupid place at a stupid time. But that event sure did spell it out clear for me: I'm afraid of punk girls because they can beat the shit out of me.

Hey, I'll admit it. I've got something of a male ego. I try to be the Emma Goldman type. But the ego is it's own. I can take some big moke whacking me across the face with his school binder. But getting taken down by a little, white, punkette from Aina Haina (or wherever) was pretty damned humiliating.

* - Nanakuli is an extremely poor neighborhood in Hawaii almost exclusively non-white. It's where the Nation of Hawaii movement was born. Kamehameha is a school set up by the last reigning monarch for kids of all economic backgrounds of Hawaiian descent.

** - "Moke" is Hawaii slang for a big, local thug who is angry a lot of the time. Not really a jock as a lot of them were just huge, 300lb shit-kickers. It's a little hard to explain. It's a concept somewhat unique to Hawaii. Mokes can also be Samoans or Tongans.

SCARRED FOR LIFE

I don't know if this story makes any sense. But here goes.

My tenure as guitarist for Scarred for Life was my first "real" experience in a punk band. Heather (my sister) was hangin' with Ed Tarantino at the time (who at the time was Straight Ed). He was over at our house chillin' when I guess he heard me playing guitar in the next room. I was practicing by playing along to a Ventures record. Ed thought, "Hey, if he can play 'Walk Don't Run' he can probably play Slayer's 'Haunting The Chapel'".

So I was recruited to play guitar. Previous to this, Rich (Ed's brother) had been the guitarist and Mako was the singer. Little did I know they hadn't told Mako about any of this and that he was being replaced as Rich decided to rock the mic.

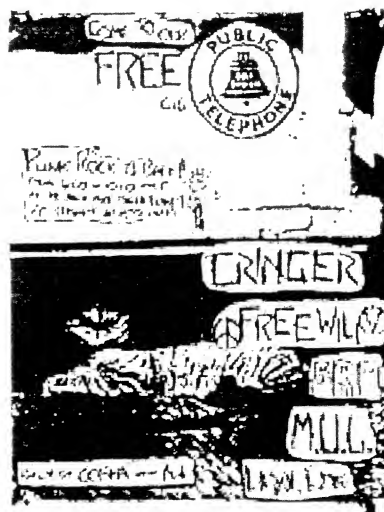
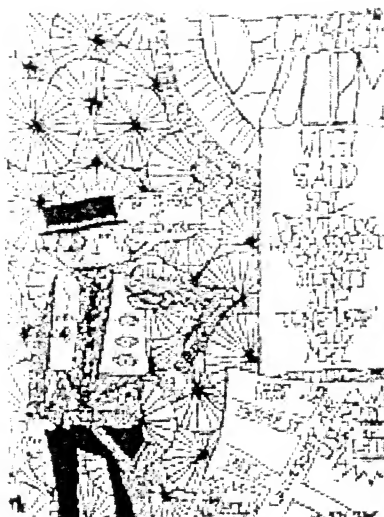
Anyway, we practiced in some old office space downtown that was hooked up through the Tarantinos through some group that their family was involved with. I'm still not really sure what Subud is, but they all seemed nice enough and I think I met

Patricia Arquette at one of their functions (totally another story).

Rich had given me a tape of just him playing all the guitar parts and I had learned the songs from that. Practice was pretty smooth. Back then, the Krolls were in a band called Nok Mub* with Kerry, Scarred For Life's drummer and Rosetta (yet another Tarantino and one of my first punk rock crushes). As a lover of all things Kroll let me say that they really haven't changed much at all since 1984. I do remember them being a little nervous about the Tarantino's new interest in Exodus, Voivod and Celtic Frost. The night we met, Jon said something to the effect of, "please don't make them into a metal band." Like I could!!!

Our first gig was at a health food restaurant and was a benefit for some RCP related thing. The only other musical act was a weird pre-Don ("Don Patrol"? "Don's Early Light"?) version of Devil Dog with Dave Carr drumming. I sort of somehow new Dave from something and was so relieved to see him. I think I remember him being

the only person smiling and laughing. I didn't know what I was doing. My lack of comprehension of reality I think was manifested in the fact that I believe I was wearing a chamois headband at the time. I could be wrong. I hope I'm wrong.



Devil Dog went down great. We were berated for our sexism. We used to cover SOA's "Girl Problems" but we really had no excuse for "Girl Problems Part 2" or "Cleavage Chicks" for that matter. I mean, yeah, that was bad. But we never had a song like "All The Fags" by the Efekt (who I loved. Shit, I loved all of the Hawaii bands.). I almost wanna say that Byron from the RCP and the Fallout maybe was the guitarist in Devil Dog at the time and Wendell was the bassist. Am I totally wrong? Was I not the only person wearing a headband?

The climax of my time in the band was the gig my sister and Ed set up at Kojak's. Sure did feel like we were getting away with something. Robert Scott's band, I think they were called Bad Posture, used to play there a couple times a week and we would go hang with them. Was Arnie in that band too? Somehow it was decided that this lizard-luring lounge would be a great place for a hardcore gig.

I don't wanna go into too much detail about the rest of the gig as I'm sure someone else can do a better job. Here are my recollections...

Before the show, Ed had put on a Slayer tape in the club's sound system. I remember David Moffat coming up to us saying "this music is the future" and thinking that was mystical and funny.

For some reason I was wearing combat boots which I had never worn before or since. I think I might have been wearing a headband again as that was now part of my "stage persona". Oh, and I was out of tune for every fucking song because I changed all of my strings right before we went on.

I remember before we started playing, the punks helped each other clear away the tables and chairs. It was so polite and so funny looking. "Let us now please adjourn to the dance floor for the slam dancing..."

Anyway, I think we played once more and I split the band. I thought I was gonna do something different and groundbreaking with Raoul from Devil Dog and Tommy from the Fallout. Looking back, I was probably just being too serious about one of Raoul's drunken rants and Tommy was just too nice to tell me to fuck off when I told him I wanted to start a band that mixed Gang Of Four with Iron Maiden.

Needless to say, within a month I knew I had made a mistake. But I was too proud to go back. So I started Cringer with Ed instead.

"Why do you care about what we do?
We don't only play for you.
Wasted talent, that's us.
But all you do is bitch and cuss."

* - They were fans of the Colorado punk band, Bum Kon. So they decided to name their band Bum Kon backwards. Oddly enough, Bum Kon's singer was none other than Revolver's El Bobo.

WHY I LOVE PUNK GIRLS

This stroll down memory lane has ultimately been an intellectual self-flagellating affair of psychic mind games of the past and historical allegories of hyperbolic relevance. So what better way to continue my soul crippling humiliation than a few stories of my puppy love crushes from back "in the day"?

I've come to learn that all the archetypes often talked about in punk rock society (and within other underground / counter cultures) are only partially true. Whether role playing via Foucault or not, Madonna/Whore or Slave/Master or whatever never really had impact on someone like me who knew what he wanted (sort of) but had no idea as to how to get it. At 16, I would have been happy with Madonna or Whore or Slave or Master or any combination of the above. For all the talk about punk rock sex, it wasn't until I left Hawaii that I realized that there was a hell of a lot less of it going on than I assumed.

Not that I didn't think about it all the time. I loved punk rock girls. I don't know what was so appealing. Maybe it WAS the whole "rich white girl gone bad" motif. So I wanted a punk rock girl friend. I found myself hanging out with a number of different girls (socially) just trying to figure out what

was in their heads. There were so many cultural barriers to analyze and critique, I couldn't believe what a sheltered life I had been living up at Kamehameha with the drama club girls and quill and scroll sweethearts. Figuring out punk rock girls was much more complex than I had realized. Jeez, in my desire to be Dionysian, I became completely Apollonian! Story of my life...

I guess I should also mention that all of these crushes were mostly from afar. In high school, I really only went out with girls from Kamehameha. That's where I went to school and the dorm scene was enough debauchery for me. It's only expected considering the punk scene was a bit distant to me. Since I didn't go to Kaiser or wherever and didn't live on THAT side of the island, I wasn't really part of the social scene until way after Scarred For Life split up. My only other sexual experiences at the time were related to my volunteer work with the Hawaii Performing Arts Company. But even I'm not ready for that kind of self-analysis.

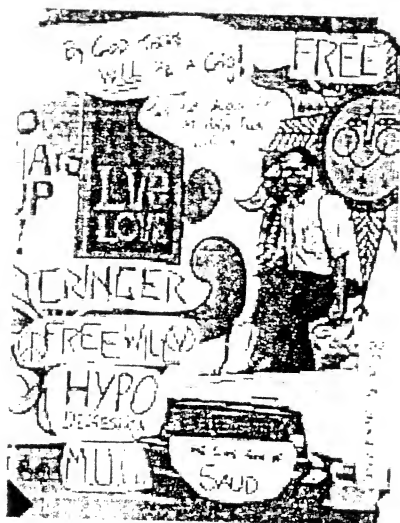
So, where do we start? At the beginning I guess.

I'll be the first to admit that my attraction to Liz and Gretchen was probably in some sick way Oedipal. Even



though we were about the same age, they seemed so much more mature than me (back then a couple of years was a huge difference. Now we are all old fucks and it doesn't really matter as we're all essentially in the "30 to 100" age group...) and I was as fascinated by them as I was attracted.

Because I was young, stupid and undiscerning, I wasn't able to fall for one but not the other. I know that almost sounds complimentary, as I couldn't like one and not the other. But it equally indicates my inability to find deeper meaning in any social relationship and its unrequited logical extent. But this is all sentimentality anyway, so I'll write it as I remember it.



Liz reminded me of my cousins in a weird way (I told you there was something sick and vaguely Oedipal about this). Uh, this is a huge stereotype and one that I'm desperately trying to destroy. But A LOT of Asian girls are pretty reserved. It's true. It's a cultural stigma. It's often true of the guys as well. But once you get to know them pretty well (or if they are close family) they can be really rambunctious and funny. Hanging out with Liz always seemed like hanging out with my cousins. She was so fucking funny all the time and I can't really explain how her sense of humor was often very culturally specific. I don't necessarily mean in content. But there was a way that I could joke around with her and Barry that was a little different. I really can't explain it without going back and writing out a complete dialog and I'm no playwright.

Gretchen was a bit more arty and I really dig that kind of thing. I remember she was working on some huge Sisters Of Mercy batik in her living room with an overhead projector and everything. She would talk about things having to do with art and philosophy that I really didn't understand. Sometimes she would be talking about people that I'd never heard of (and really wished I had). Other times she ventured off on an explanatory tangent in that alluring, can't-quite-place-it, vague accent of hers. I know that sounds either pretentious or hippy-dippy. But that really wasn't the case. I don't think I really romanticize that sort of thing. She was just a genuinely interesting and creative person who at that time was much more self-aware than I even am now.

Hey, they were smart interesting girls who were foxy. As a straight guy, you could either be intimidated by them or you could worship them.

I was flattered that people as interesting as them would even talk to me much less not make fun of me constantly (I guess that was Morgan's job). I remember when they got back from England (which was a real milestone in itself) they were talking about this great new band on Crass called KUKL. That was enough for me to buy the record and start writing the band. That's how I got to be pen pals (albeit briefly) with Gunnar and Bjork. Those KUKL records are still ahead of their time and surely that says a lot about Liz and Gretchen.

There's something indefinably appealing about the goth chick look. Especially in Hawaii where everything is bright and loud and colorful, the negation of it all will always be sexy in an alienated way. Mix that with their smarts and their mixed drinks and they were the girls I dreamed of ever since seeing Julie Christy in "Billy Liar". They were the bohemians I'd been reading so much about. They made me want to do something more interesting than be in a hardcore band.

It's true that it deeply affected "my music" (ha ha ha). At first I just wanted to fit in. I had zero creative urges. I didn't have an idea about what I was or what I wanted to express. I just wanted to be in a band that was exactly like Minor Threat or Crass (there's still some truth in that). But knowing how totally uninteresting that must have been to Liz and Gretchen made me really take a long hard look at myself (not like that, you pervert) and assess what I was

trying to do. How could I be even vaguely as interesting to these girls as they were to me?



Well, that's one that I never solved. When you're young and a guy and a guitar player it's hard not to want to just play something loud and fast. Took me years to find any sort of subtlety in my playing. It took years of reeducation via "The Band",

"Harvest", This Mortal Coil, the Velvet Underground and side two of "Exile On Main Street" before I learned anything about timbre or dynamics (fuck you, those records are all related).

But years later, I'm still in the same pattern as far as finding someone like Liz or Gretchen and letting that be some sort of beacon to do more than I would otherwise; to try a little harder. Yeah, it's me being eager to please. But I'm usually a good enough judge of character that it all works out in the end.

WHEN GOOD BANDS GO BAD AND YOU FIND YOURSELF LIKING THEM

It happens all the time. Some people call it selling out. Some people think the band just ran out of ideas. Others think they've become self-indulgent. But really, there are a million reasons why most bands don't take the Ramones "arc" of challenging songwriting. This isn't really any attempt to explain why bands do it. It's not even a sociological analysis of punk rock bands having a mid-career artistic crisis. "Holy shit, we're just the Knack with different costumes!" Nope, I've got no answers. Maybe this is just a plea for understanding.

Yeah, I know. I used to be one of those guys. I used to be the angry rocker kid. PISSED about "The Game" by Queen and the third LP in "Sandinista". I was that guy. I felt fucked over.

When I was a kid, my family moved around a lot. I wasn't a military brat. But I could relate with parents that were basically nuts. By the time I turned 18 I had been through five different schools and lived in seven different towns. That may not be a lot to some people. But I did find it hard constantly having to make new friends. Blah, blah, blah... Same old sob story. But it really seemed like the whole fuckin' world was against me and the one thing I had were my bands. When they changed, it was like being deserted all over again. Sound stupid? You betcha.

But now I'm the old guy. Shit, I'm in no position to dictate to a band what to do in their creative process. I sure don't listen to what people tell me. If I went by that J Church poll I did a year ago, I'd have to put out an all-acoustic album next. Hmmm...

So, I don't think anyone can guess why bands suddenly decide to artistically rediscover themselves. Who even knows by most people bother to start bands? I'm constantly fascinated by musicians and their desire to play music no matter how mundane or pointless the endeavor. Maybe if I can find any sort of consensus I'll know why I keep playing music and for once in my life have some sort of direction. A plan even...

For a while, I found myself giving bands props for making a commercially suicidal change in direction. My life as a musician has unwittingly been based on that principle, so I need the company. Maybe you can relate. Maybe people relating to my consistent strategy of commercial suicide IS the principle my world is based on. Hmmmm...

At the time of this strange revelation of forgiveness, I found myself saying things like "well,

'Metal Machine Music' is probably bullshit no matter what anyone says. But, hey, I RESPECT Lou for doing it" or "You gotta give Bad Religion credit for trying something new with "Into The Unknown" though it does sound like the Steve Miller Band. Am I right? No?"

But after moving to Texas I found myself getting into an even stranger area. Maybe it was because I wasn't working at first and had way too much free time on my hands. I don't know. I found myself not only having new sympathies for these bands and their altruistic musical garbage, but actually finding some meaning and value to these once un-listenable records.

So, it's confession time now. Hmmmmmmmmmm...

I like the second and third Generation X albums. What can I say? "Running With The Boss Sound" is a great Mott the Hoople-ish rock song. Total anthem. "Fridays Angels" is great pop. "Heaven's Inside" is as good as anything on Polyvinyl today. I mean, I love "Ready Steady Go". But I can't help but like the other records. And what the hell is wrong with "Dancing With Myself"? Nothing, that's what.

Oh, it hurts. But I really like the three albums by Eric Burden and the New Animals. Yeah, the most shamelessly idiotic lyrics and liner notes you'll ever see, I know. How can you title a song "Yes, I Am Experienced"? For shame, Eric Burden, for shame. Shit, it's such a cliché. But I really have found myself loving the band and therefore loving the tunes. Their version of "Paint It Black" might actually be inspired! I even dig "San Francisco" and get a little misty for my city by the bay when I hear it.

That's not good enough? How about this? You like the Jam? I do too. I love 'em so much; I can totally understand how Paul Weller made the transition from that band to the Style Council. "My Ever Changing Moods" is as good as anything by the Jam. Ditto for "Shout It To The Top" and "Speak Like A Child". If you ever get a chance to see any of their videos, I recommend it. It shows how funny they were and how they weren't nearly as stoic as they seemed.

I've got you up against the ropes now. Time to finish you off. Not only do I really dig the Sabbath albums with Dio. I fucking LOVE the album with Ian Gillan. I'm not gonna deny that I love Sabbath AND Deep Purple equally. I do. So that album was like when Spider Man was helping out the X-men. Yeah, same thing. "Zero The Hero" is heavy as fuck and "Trashed" may actually be my favorite Sabbath song. Sad but true.

Hmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm...

THE KINKS, THE ANIMALS AND LOU REED OR I M GETTING REALLY FUCKING OLD

Okay, it's a really bad time for music right now. How do I know this? I keep desperately going to the local record store wanting to be inspired by something new. What did I buy on my last trip to Sound Exchange? The Kinks "Muswell Hillbillies", Eric Burden & The Animals "Winds Of Change" and Lou Reed "Transformer". The saddest part of all: I've already owned all of these records at one point or another.

"Why is that so pathetic?" you ask., "people buy and sell their records all the time."

No, not me, I don't. Sorry, I just can't do that. I sell records when I have doubles. I sell records when they wear out. Most often, I sell records when I dislike them or have just lost interest in them.

That was the case with these three records. But the state of music is so bad right now and my desperation to hear something new and add it to my permanent collection drove me to this purchase. I've been listening to these records and I have to admit that they're sounding good. Almost inspirational. Fuck, things are bad for music right now.

So, let's start with the Kinks' "Muswell Hillbillies" since I've got the least commitment to it. Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's the Kinks and despite the stuff they put out in the '80s, I find it really hard to dislike Ray, Dave and the guys.

Though you wouldn't guess it from the music press and the self-proclaimed guardians of rock-n-roll culture (Rolling Stone, basically), the early music by the Kinks was at least as groundbreaking and influential as all the early stuff from the Stones, the Who and the Yardbirds. There are hundreds of new garage bands all over the world that in some way or another are essentially re-working "You Really Got Me" or "So Tired". They may cite some obscure German skiffle band as their inspiration. But it's all bullshit. The first dozen singles by the Kinks defined garage music and set the parameters.

But I have to admit I only own one record from that time period. When I was 12 or 13 I bought the Kinks Greatest Hits, which basically covered all of their early stuff. I've never been compelled to buy anything else (although I am one of the few people I know that likes the live album with the "Batman" into "So Tired" jam). I love those songs. But if I ever feel the need to hear them, I can turn on any number of Classic Rock stations and have a fair chance of hitting one. Certainly one within the hour...

"Muswell Hillbillies" comes from the second period of great Kinks music. It was a time when everyone felt obligated to push the boundaries of rock-n-roll (thankfully) to catch up with what the Beatles had done. The results were both

awe inspiring and pretentious (usually more the latter. But like in any war, there must be casualties...). The Kinks were certainly guilty of both as they went through a series of "concept" albums, which also included "Arthur" and "Lola Vs. Powerman". Because of those two records, this is my favorite era of Kinks music.

I don't even want to get into the concepts behind these records. They're all really dumb and embarrassing and really have nothing to do with why I like the records. Fortunately, the story lines are usually thin enough that you can ignore them and just face these records as platters of well-crafted music put together in an orchestrated and cohesive manner. It's not just a bunch of decent songs thrown together for the kids. There's a mood you can only get by listening to the whole damn thing.

There's a lot of stuff going on with "Muswell Hillbillies" musically. It's a very toned down record. Even the opening rocker ("20th Century Man") starts off very slowly and the vocals never betray any sort of rock n roll theatrics. It's clearly the lead in song meant to draw in the listener (like how every action film starts off with something violent and predictable). Sure, this is the most rocking song on the album. But there are no tricks. No fancy production. No guitar bombast. One vocal track. Nothing up Ray's sleeves.

Most of the songs here are based around an acoustic guitar track. Sometimes keys. But there's not much all out guitar attack. That's not to say it isn't a full sounding and exciting record. It just means it wasn't recorded with the live performance in mind. I think this is why I rejected the record the first time around. I bought it when I was a lot younger. There was a time when most of the records I loved, I could only understand when I visualized them being played live. I imagined the band rocking out on stage to the fans all singing along. I played air guitar and wanted to be in the band. (On a side note, I think that's the real appeal of punk to most of us. A lot of kids don't want cerebral. They don't even want thoughtful. They want a song that a) they can play air guitar to and b) they can imagine the crowd at Gilman Street or wherever singing along to in unison. Nothing more and nothing less. That's why I can appreciate "This Is The Angry" by 7 Seconds AND "Fox On The Run" by Sweet.)

You can't play air guitar and you can't really imagine the Kinks playing "Muswell Hillbillies" live. There's some faux country on this record and Ray has been known to fashion a slight drawl from time to time. It's not that corny and the flat production keeps the record from veering into a Byrds' "Sweetheart of the Rodeo" area (which is a great record in itself).

The band is great as usual and that's a lot of why this

record works instead of falling flat on its face like a bloated dose of Canned Heat. It's really easy to make a boring plodding record with this kind of formula. When you tone the music down, it's really easy to go too far into the oblivion of low-key lightness. But the band keeps the edge in plain sight. I guess it's no surprise that the Kinks always have a really solid rhythm section. What do you expect after years of riffing on "You Really Got Me"?

It's a subdued record that didn't really produce any lasting hits. Most people I know don't even know it exists. But now that I look back, I think it's a pretty great album. No "Lola" or "Victoria". But sometimes you've got to walk away from the hit machine to produce something really personal.

I knew I was in for trouble when I looked at the gatefold of Eric Burden & The Animals' "Winds Of Change". God, Eric Burden was such an asshole. I'm not sure if I've ever read such painful liner notes. Here's a sample of his thanks list:

"Roland Kirk – who is such an inspiration... Mick Jagger – who is really my brother... George Harrison – from whom I learn from being in the same room... President Johnson – whom I hope will listen. Ho Chi Minh – whom I hope will listen (maybe with L.B.J.)"

So, this is a really pretentious record. A lot of it is just really, really bad poetry read over jams. It's the kind of thing you think of when you think of bad hippie dippy crap. Have you ever seen "The Producers"? (It's one of my favorite films of all time and it's certainly the best thing Mel Brooks ever did. I'd tell you why it's great. But you should really just go out and rent it now if you haven't seen it.) Anyway, for those of you who have seen it (which I'm hoping is most of you as it's a pretty famous movie), there's a scene where they're auditioning Hitler's for their musical. "Love Power" lyrically sums up most of this record.

Eric Burden had the nerve to write a song called "Yes, I Am Experienced" as a response to the Hendrix classic. What was he thinking? That's not even the worst lyric of the record!

Okay, here's where I start to sound like a sucker. What can I say? The band is great and if you can get past the lyrics, the songs are really well crafted. Even their cover of "Paint It Black" comes off as urgent and fresh propelled by a drum sound that nobody has successfully recorded since (although the Flaming Lips are getting close).

The big hit on the record was "San Francisco Nights". I always felt kind of embarrassed by that song having lived there for the past decade. But with a little distance, I'm not as annoyed by the naively utopian lyrics about the old Haight Ashbury scene and I can see that the music is really quite nice. It's part "Rubber Soul" era Beatles and part early Bee Gees or something.

There's a lot of bad stuff happening on this record. I can't deny that. But if you don't look at the liner notes and you just completely avoid songs like "Black Plague" and "Man-

Woman" it's a pretty rocking little piece of vinyl.

So, I finally am starting to go back to Lou Reed. There isn't much of his solo stuff that I don't find totally appalling. But as each record gets worse and worse, I find myself going back to the stuff closest to the source. Back when he still had a little of the Velvet Underground's glow on him...

"Transformer" is a good record if you ignore who made it and what he was capable of. It's a good record when you consider it was produced by David Bowie and Mick Ronson who are usually pretty untalented at it unless it's their own stuff. It's a bad record when you consider that most people feel it's Lou's best stuff outside of the Velvet Underground. In that context, you really need to wonder: what was he thinking?

"Vicious" is the best song on the record. I'm not being objective here. It's the best song and you're wrong if you think otherwise. While it's not a perfecting of the "Sweet Jane" riff, it's at least an interesting re-working with enough guitar bite that you really get your hopes up high, high, high for the rest of the album. Yeah, the rest of the record is "nice". Fuck, I hate most of that glam shit that was happening and I think all the "Ziggy" era Bowie stuff needs a careful re-evaluation. "Transformer" certainly rises above that stuff. But there's not too much substance to battle the style.

"A Perfect Day" is a pretty, innocuous song. It's nice. It's really nice. I don't even mind that he talks about Sangria. Shit, he might as well have made the song about drinking wine coolers. "Walk On The Wild Side"... Yeah, it's a nice song. But essentially he's saying, "hey, look at the transvestites! They're WILD, man!" But something had to make that song stand out. You take away the lyrics and you're left with some tame, David Sanborn sounding pap. But I guess that's the beauty of the song. Lyrics about blowjobs and speed ultimately wind up deconstructing the parent rock of the music.

I think one of the worst problems with the record is the destruction of "Satellite Of Love". Originally a Velvet Underground song, "Satellite Of Love" was an energetic rocker fitting nicely between "We're Gonna Have A Real Good Time Together" and "Rock And Roll". But on "Transformer" it's transformed into something else. Light, Elton John pap. I mean, it would be great if Elton John came up with that song. But what was Lou doing? Was it purposely done to piss off Velvet Underground fans? Was it some sort of rejection of the early noise that was the foundation that allowed for his future creative freedom? Was he biting the hand that feeds again?

I don't know. I'm keeping this record this time around if that means anything. I mean, it's okay. But it's very confusing. I'm still left wondering: what was Lou thinking?

I wrote this thing years ago, but never really put it out anywhere. It seems to sort of go with the article about good bands going bad. So, there you have it...

SUMMER MUSIC

Okay, it's the start of summer and even though I'm living in an unbearably hot climate and my world would probably be a lot nicer if I never once saw sunlight, I still love the concept of summer. In a tribute to that I'd like to write something about what I think of as MY SUMMER MUSIC.

I guess I should start by defining what I think of as being "Summer Music". I'm not necessarily talking about songs with the word "summer" in the title or in the lyrics. I'm not even really talking about songs with lyrics about the summer. I mean in it partially in the English sense. You know, it's songs that have really summed up great things about certain summers gone by. It's a feel and hopefully you'll know what I mean. The songs aren't necessarily fast or slow. They're not disposable or profound. I guess they're all songs I would love to hear booming out of a boom box or a stereo while at a summer afternoon party. Think of it this way: if I were making a mix tape for the summer, here would be my picks.

"Too Late" by Snuff – Might be my favorite song of theirs and I'm not totally sure if it's about the girl from Lush. But this is a great, jump-around-the-room kind of summer song and is quintessential Snuff. When that first mid-tempo change-up happens ("That's why I'm still thinking about the times and places...") I feel like I'm right back in the moment at one of their gigs.

"Don't Wanna See You Cry" by the Hard Ons – Side 1 of "Love Is A Battlefield" starts off with a hopping pop punk number long before pop punk had so many negative connotations. Buzzing around the room, pop that can be as meaningless or meaningful as you like. Like a lot of the songs I'll be mentioning, this is the kind of tune that you'll wanna hear while on a road trip to nowhere.

"Inbetween Days" by the Cure – People always associate the Cure with Goths and all that dark stuff and related silliness. I never could understand that. Probably it's just because fans of both the Cure and Specimen wore big shirts and make-up and broaches. A lot of songs are light and breezy and that's when I think they might be at their best.

"Oblivious" by Aztec Camera – That last one made me think of the sweeping acoustic guitars of this, the ONLY thing I've ever really enjoyed by this band. Still, it's worth finding the record in the dollar bins for the one track. Put it on a comp tape and you'll never have to think of this record again. I mean, this almost verges on being a wine cooler type of summer song. But I like to think of it as more of a drinking on the beach sort of ditty.

"William, It Was Really Nothing" by the Smiths – It's hard to only pick one song by the Smiths for this category. It would be just as right to choose "Cemetery Gates" or "I Want The One I Can't Have" or "Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now". But this one seems to round off the trio of

sweeping acoustic guitars nicely. It's about rain. But I always think of rain songs as taking place on an otherwise sunny day. It's with the understanding that rain is a good thing.

"Through The Flowers" by the Primitives – I know most people only know this band because of "Crash" which is great. But this is probably the first thing I heard from them. It's a shame they couldn't follow through on all of this pop music promise. I dunno. I guess "Through The Flowers" is nice to me because it's a really sort of sad song about walking in the sun and sort of reflects how depressing that can be.

"Cool Guitar Boy" by Heavenly – I still think that "Heavenly Vs. Satan" is the best thing they ever did. Everything on this record is great. But this one is really about running around London with friends eating and drinking myself into bankruptcy. London really does live for its seasons in a strange way. For such a modern city, it's all strangely... I dunno... almost pagan in it's interconnectedness with the seasons. This is the Sarah indie pop version of that.

"I Could Be In Heaven" by the Flatmates – In the similar vein of girl pop but more along the lines of the Ramones, it's hard to believe America never caught on to the Flatmates. I guess that would also explain why the Muffs first album didn't go platinum (like it should have done!). Either way, one of those sweet songs about hopelessly fleeting love. The best summers of your youth are those where you had been able to sustain a crush for all three months. Unrequited or not, the chase is usually better than the catch.

"Los Angeles" by X – Maybe it's got something to do with the scene in the movie "The State Of Things" by Wim Wenders but I do associate this song (and a lot of stuff by X) with driving around LA (always observational on my part as someone who doesn't drive). This song makes me think of the heat wave I lived through back in '88 (I think) while living in Hollywood and Kingsley.

"Corona" by the Minutemen – It's obvious as hell. But all of "Double Nickels" on it's own could be a great soundtrack to LA in the summer. Something about the production of that one in particular, the twang of the guitar, captures something about LA for me. It's almost corny. It's almost abrasive. The whole record makes me crave Mexican food for some reason.

"I Remember" by Naked Raygun – Again, it would have been equally just to pick "Soldier's Requiem" or "Wonderbeer" or "Vanilla Blue". But this one is especially nostalgia inducing while the song is completely propelling. "All Rise" is definitely my favorite record of theirs. Something about Naked Raygun was always so able to catch that feeling of déjà vu that only a few others are able to induce. Their best songs stir you inside and leave you not

really knowing why.

"Let's Get Tattoos" by Carter the Unstoppable Sex Machine – I still maintain that whatever good there might be in Andrew WK or whatever stems from Rocket From The Crypt and Carter. A really underrated single by the once loved band, it's a slightly classier version of "Let's Get A Party Started" or whatever the hell that song is called.

"Just What I Needed" by the Cars – It's not rock and it's not new wave and you couldn't totally call it pop music. What were the Cars? This is everyone's favorite song and you are always happy when it comes on the radio.

"On Top Of The World" by Cheap Trick – Hidden behind "Surrender" is another great pop gem on "Heaven Tonight". Almost written like a Randy Newman song, another great song that reminds me of staying out late as a teen and pre-teen taking advantage of my parents lax attitude. This is like driving around with a bunch of your friends in their parents car late on a week night with nothing to do 'cos it's July.

"Do Ya" by ELO – One of their straight forward rockers and a leftover from the days of the Move, this song is mostly three BIG power chords. There's not even much of the strings on this one. Still, not as corny as "Ma Ma Ma Belle". Definitely cruising down the road music.

"Jet" by Wings – I know. I'm a loser. I just love Wings and this song is just another summer song for me. In fact, it's a perfect summer song. It doesn't fucking mean anything and yet it tricks you into feeling sentimental for something that never existed. It's catchy as hell!

"Young Americans" by David Bowie – I'm not really a huge Bowie fan. There's a lot of stuff that I think is okay and some stuff that I think is interesting. But I think all the dress up stuff was always pretty dumb. So I have no shame in saying that I love this record and found it infinitely more interesting than all the Ziggy Stardust crap. Truly a bar-b-que anthem for the hipster jet set.

"Shining Star" by Earth Wind & Fire – What a rippin' band! Brutal guitar solo from outer space! The chorus is as smooth as a cool breeze. Earth, Wind & Fire's "Greatest Hits" is a must have. "Shining Star" is for me about being a little kid and hanging out with my Aunt listening to cool shit on the radio. She may not have thought it was cool. But it made me think of a childhood crush of sorts.

"All Day Music" by War – Ditto for this band's amazing greatest hits. Way the hell laid back, this one makes me think of backyard parties from the afternoon and into the evening. There's nothing like some lazy horns in a major key to make you think of the joy of that brief time where the sun is going down and it's still light out. It's a relief and the bugs haven't started buzzing around yet.

"One Of A Kind Love Affair" by the Spinners – I love the album that also includes "Could It Be I'm Falling In Love" and "I'll Be Around". If you gotta pick one, I guess it would have to be this one as it's not as well known as far as the hits go. Great off-speed drumming that I never really noticed as a kid. It's a sad little song with a really funny piano break.

"Tell Me Something Good" by Rufus and Chaka Khan – Ooh, it's so hard just picking one song for my summer mix tape. I almost equally want "Hollywood" to be here. I guess I have to go with the raunch over the mellow this time. Chaka Khan, I don't know what else there is to say. Great vocoder/talk box as well preceding the summer sounds of Daft Punk.

"When You Were Mine" by Prince – Not the cover version by Cyndi Lauper, but the original. "Dirty Mind" is one of Prince's best records and at least as raunchy as "Controversy". But hidden with all the songs about incest and casual sex this little pop song was tucked away. It almost sounds like Helen Love or something.

"Overkill" by Men At Work – Seriously, who would have thought that these dorks could come up with something so touching. Their most understated single is really the only thing tolerable about this band. I think some alt. rock type band did a bad cover of this a few years ago. Maybe picking something by such a useless band is obscenely sentimental. Even the sax is about letting you get out your secret David Sanborn fetish that first surfaced back on "Young Americans". It's really a warm night time song fueled by Vodka.

"My Old School" by Steely Dan – Man, those horns are just like the last day of high school. I guess the whole song is about reminiscing and taking an early summer vacation to Mexico. It's funny how even looking back in anger at ones youth can be a joyful experience.

"I Want You Back" by The Jackson Five – Okay, kind of an obvious one to end on. But you have to go out big. I think I've heard this song at least once in every great summer I've ever had in my life.

That summer feeling is gonna
haunt you for the rest of your
life...

Jonathan Richman

WHAT HAPPENED TO RnB?

I was watching that stupid Jackson Five reunion show on TV a little while back. Yeah, it was way over the top and stupid. But despite the really embarrassing stage show and the personal meaning of a middle aged Jackson 5 deep in the back of my mind, I was still pretty stoked when they did the all too brief parade of classics. The sound was terrible and their voices are all pretty done, but since these were some of my favorite songs of all time I was still excited. For some reason even this totally horrible version of "I'll Be There" still makes me teary eyed.

I turned off the TV before the morons like Brittany Spears came on, as I really didn't want to know. After my 15 minutes of Motown nostalgia was over I was overwhelmed by depression. What happened to R & B?

I'm a huge fan of the commercial shit. I'll admit it. As much as I dig the Stax box set, I've always been more of a Motown fan. Yeah, I'm one of those people that prefer the Supremes to the Beatles. I also think the Philadelphia sound was as revolutionary with it's mixture of music and politics as the avant-garde jazz scene.

But where is that music now and why is there such a huge difference in what is considered R & B today? Where did the songs go? When did the production values go from the warmth of Hitsville USA to MTV/VH1 slick bullshit?

When Destiny's Child were on Saturday Night Live a few months back I actually found myself enjoying their second number. Pretty soon I realized that it was a cover of Samantha Sang's "Emotions" written by the Bee Gees. Shit, nothing is new anymore. Hollywood can't make a decent new movie and the best they can come up with is bullshit remakes of films like "Abres Los Ojos". I guess it shouldn't be any shock that nobody in the big, big leagues of pop music can come up a decent tune and so the best they can do is a remake of a Bee Gees throwaway.

I know nobody agrees with me. But I guess I equate the death of R & B with the death of punk rock. Commercial interests eventually outweighed artistic interests. Of course, it's still arguable in any art form that you're fate is sealed once you even begin to consider commercial interests. But for all the music press and political ideas that many people in both genres claimed, some of the more basic day-to-day living realities were never taken into account. Punk rock died because it was afraid to become an art form and in it's confusion became part of the rock business that had taken over just a few years earlier. R & B was never allowed to be taken seriously as an art form and with everything happening in black America in the '60s and '70s; they had bigger fish to fry.

So now both music forms are in another state of resurrection in mainstream music. I don't have to bore you with another rant about major label punk rock. So what? Punk has a thriving underground and DIY scene. Besides, mainstream punk rock is just about done. But what

happens to R & B as we knew and loved it? Is it dead?

It really is true that R & B has never totally gotten the respect it was due. Not to diminish the importance of the Beatles (as if I could!) but it is important to remember that the Supremes were charting competitively in the US at the time. Especially in the mid-'60s, the arrangements of both groups were equally innovative. But I don't think it's any surprise that because of race issues, Motown never got the same intellectual analysis and that has had a resounding effect.

Even when other musical forms of the black community crossed over to R & B it was looked at as a kind of dumbing down. When Albert Ayler and Rahsaan Roland Kirk began crossing over, it never shed new light on the importance of R & B. Rather, that music was seen as being low points for both musicians creatively. Albert Ayler was even accused of playing R & B as a sell out move.

Personally, I quite like both of those ventures. "Blacknuss" is probably one of my favorite Rahsaan Roland Kirk records and I actually love all the different versions he's done of "My Girl" (in a concert in Hamburg shortly after the release of this record there's a version of that Temptations cover at breakneck speed). I also really like the simple joyfulness of "Heart Love" on "New Grass". Yeah, I like the vocals. I don't know why that's such a hard stretch to make. If part of the joy of listening to someone like Ayler is listening to him stretch for the high notes and not always hit them, then missing certain notes with the vocals can also be acceptable?

While there may or may not have ever been completely altruistic artistic aspirations in the Motown scene or the Gamble / Huff scene of Philly, there was also no encouragement from most of the music establishment. With no alternatives and certainly no role models, the direction of R & B was co-opted (like most other things) in the material '80s. God, the '80s were a fucking miserable time.

But like punk rock, the materialism of the '80s was only one aspect of the problem and blaming it entirely on the "Me" Reagan years is an oversimplification. The rise of hip-hop in the '80s (probably the last important occurrence in pop culture since punk rock) also had an unexpected effect on music.

In it's earliest incarnations, the music was a simple backdrop for the MCs to rap over. The simplicity of early Sugar Hill records production was partly due to limitations of the technology at the time. But as any Grand Master Flash record will show you, given the freedom there was a lot of room to move creatively. In other words, simplicity in backing music was somewhat desirable as not to detract from the vocalist and/or message.

From early on, R&B songs were occasionally sampled (Chic for example) to build backing tracks. Of course, the

popularity of this style has grown and grown to now where it's a more common than not format in hip-hop.

In the late '80s and early '90s, a new trend began with DJs remixing current R&B singles often with instrumental tracks. The next step, of course, was to bring in MCs to rap over extended mixes. As hip-hop grew and grew in popular consciousness, its importance in the music business surpassed that of R&B switching the dynamic of supply and demand between DJ and R&B artist.

Currently, R&B finds itself cashing in big with music that works better as back up to rappers rather than pop songs. The vague tunes just barely existing in the ether of TLC or Destiny's Child are secondary to the slick production and pedantic professionalism. The music is a mechanical product like I Macs or Big Macs or new VW Beetles. In my most cynical, I'd imagine R&B in the future would exist solely as music with the one hope of eventually being used as a sample.

RnB ESSENTIALS, FOR THE MOST PART

Here's a brief list of "must-have" r'n'b type stuff here at Honey Bear Central. If you are already at all a scholar of the '70s r'n'b and soul school, this may seem a little pedestrian. I'm no expert, but it seems like a good set o' tunes that I can't imagine living without 24 hour access to...

THE O'JAYS "Backstabbers" is probably one of the most known moments in the Philly Sound. But they had a lot of other great songs like "992 Arguments" and "For The Love of Money".

More great Philly Sound tracks would include SOUL SURVIVORS "Expressway to your Heart", THE INTRUDERS "Cowboys To Girls" and "I'll Always Love My Mama", BILLY PAUL "Me and Mrs. Jones", JOE SIMON "Drowning In The Sea Of Love" and, of course, THE THREE DEGREES "When Will I See You Again".

THE DELFONICS "La-La Means I Love You", "Break Your Promise", "Didn't I (Blow Your Mind This Time)", "Ready or Not Here I Come (Can't Hide From Love)"

I dig ROSE ROYCE with "Car Wash" and "I Wanna Get Next To You".

I love RUFUS AND CHAKA KHAN's "Tell Me Something Good" and "Hollywood".

I actually like THE BROTHERS JOHNSON version of "Strawberry Letter 23" better than the original.

BLOODSTONE "Natural High", "BLUE MAGIC "Side Show", THE WHISPERS "Lady" are great slow jams... Same goes for HEATWAVE's "Always and Forever". Rumor is that Topper Headon drummed for them before the Clash.

THE SUPREMES are my favorite of the Motown bunch. I love all the hits. I once got in trouble with a roadie and band member for saying that I always liked them more than the Beatles. It's true!

SMOKEY ROBINSON is the king. But I'm especially fond of "Tracks of My Tears", "You've Really Got A Hold On Me", "The Tears of a Clown", "Cruisin'" and "Being With You".

THE JACKSON FIVE are of course Motown legends as well. "I Want You Back", "ABC", "I'll Be There" and "Never Can Say Goodbye" are all great. People always also forget what a great solo record "Off The Wall" was for Michael Jackson. "Rock With You" is a classic.

Let's face it; most of the Motown hits are crucial. I actually prefer the '70s stuff in general. I love STEVIE WONDER'S "Innervisions" and I really like later FOUR TOPS stuff like "Ain't No Woman (Like The One I've Got)".

THE SPINNERS "I'll Be Around", "One of a Kind Love Affair", "Could It Be I'm Falling In Love?", "Rubberband Man"

THE STYLISTICS "Stop, Look, Listen (To Your Heart)", "You Are Everything", "You're A Big Girl Now", "Betcha By Golly, Wow", "I'm Stone In Love With You" and "You Make Me Feel Brand New"

THE INDEPENDENTS pretty much anything off of "The First Time We Met"

THE FRIENDS OF DISTINCTION "Grazing in the Grass" is a little mersh. But it's such a sweet pop song...

EARTH, WIND AND FIRE were my second favorite part of that stupid "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" movie (next to Aerosmith). You've gotta love "Shining Star", "That's The Way Of The World" and "Reasons". I love "Fantasy" too.

And, yeah, it's stupid, but I like "Float On" by THE FLOATERS.

There's loads more I'm just forgetting at this late hour. While the salad days of RnB (in my opinion) are long gone. That doesn't mean I hate everything going on today. "The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill" is fantastic.

STOP LOOK LISTEN (TO YOUR HEART)

SUSIE IBARRA

I had the good fortune of being able to see Mephista here in Austin a few months back. I mostly found out about the band because of my interest in drummer / percussionist Susie Ibarra. I remember seeing photos of downtown jazz ensembles and wondering "who is this little Asian girls with all these tough guys?" I started investigating some of her music and couldn't believe what I was hearing. She is one of the most fluid and inventive drummers I've ever heard in my life. Her integration of traditional Asian instruments into her set is seamless and not obtuse like I was expecting. It's a huge sound from a tiny person. In fact, at the end of the Mephista set when she, Sylvie Courvoisier and Ikue Mori (late of DNA!) collected in the middle of the "stage" to take a bow, I thought Mothra was gonna appear at any

moment.

Despite my disorganization and lack of punctuality, she still made the time between tours to grant me this interview. Photos: Heung-Heung Chin (portrait), Claudio Casanova (live)

Lance - How old were you when you moved to the states? I may be wrong, but I think I heard that you were born in the Philippines...

Susie - I was born in Anaheim California - in Martin Luther King Hospital - I lived in California and Iowa til I was 4 - I lived 12 years in Houston and I am going on my 16th year in NYC.

Lance - What was is like for you growing up in Hous-



ton in the '70s and '80s?

Susie - I was a kid, so I grew up around my family and family friends, so around Filipinos I was a minority in school - along with Vietnamese and Mexicans. Now a days Houston is such a huge diverse city - there are so many Asians and Hispanics - there are so many immigrants from all over - great food.

Lance - I was in College Station for a little while in the '70s and even as a third grader I was getting a lot of grief from racist, redneck youth...

Susie - Sorry you got that as a child - I was very fortunate to be around great people and I made really nice friends growing up. At that time we lived maybe 1/2 an hour from the Ku Klux Klan - which does not exist there any more - but they never came to our neighbor hoods - My father, who is a doctor and formally a surgeon, operated once on the grand dragon, He was all smiles, and very proud of that! Imagine, they had to come to my dad for the operation!

Lance - What drew you to music? What made you decide to pick up the drums? It wasn't your first instrument, was it?

Susie - I began playing piano at the age of 4. I played classical piano for 14 years, and then I played piano and organ in school. Filipinos love to sing and play piano - so my mother put us all in piano - and I sung in several choirs. I started to play drum set in high school in a hard core / punk band named Devil Donkey. It was fun, and I started to play drums also because it was really fun and a great pleasure to play drums and grooves.

Lance - When you first started drumming, were you aware or concerned in any way with the social unacceptability of a girl (much less an Asian girl) playing drums?

Susie - No. I come from a pretty progressive family. My parents are very open-minded people. They are also really strengths for me. They learned their open-mindedness through wisdom - through experience - and through 5 kids.

It never dawned on me that society would be so behind the times!

Lance - When you started drumming, were you interested in jazz? Did you have interest back then in Asian percussion?

Susie - As I said, I started in a punk band. I also started to listen to jazz in high school - and have an affinity for it. My parents listened to jazz -but the older styles. Before college, I went on my first trip to the Philippines alone - to

visit my family, and see the country. I came to NYC when I was 17 years old, as an artist, a painter, I came for school. But I brought my drums and that was that. I started to play gong music - Filipino Kulintang, Javanese and Balinese Gamelan when I was a teenager. And I also fell in love with Jazz music then and started studying and playing.

Lance - Do you remember any punk band names or song titles? Are there any recordings of any of this stuff?

Susie - I don't have any recordings, sorry.

Lance - Did you go to many punk shows? Do you remember any bands you would have seen at the time? Did you feel any connection to that scene?

Susie - We would open for various bands - at the Axiom - crazy and we listened to other bands - I think the Flaming Lips are still around, yes? And the Butthole Surfers, and a bunch of bands that I can't remember

the names,

Lance - Why did you decide to leave Texas?

Susie - I came up to NYC as an artist and a student.



Lance - The story goes that you were inspired to follow the current path you are on by seeing Sun Ra Arkestra. How did you come across him?

Susie - I first listened to Sun Ra, on a Disney record when I was a teenager - they did a version of Pink Elephants. I was intrigued! It was great. And you know they did Spider Man - so I wanted to see them live.

Lance - What was it about the show that made you decide you wanted to play such adventurous music?

Susie - Sun Ra has very beautiful music - He is coming out of the big band era from Chicago of Fletcher Henderson. And he also was the first to bring the Moog - and electric keyboards into jazz. He also is so wacky and fun. His music is totally unique.

Lance - Was there ever a time that you were delineating the differences between music as art and music as entertainment? Was it always clear-cut for you? Are you still questioning it?

Susie - Never thought about it in that way. I understand it can be two very separate things or also the same thing sometimes.

Lance - You are a school-trained musician. What do you think were some of the most helpful and/or pivotal points in your musical education that helped define what you do?

Susie - You have to love it. Music is a love for me. And I think having this affinity for it, allows me to have endurance and have also the discipline to explore it and to continue through it. It is constantly an immense education - and I am not speaking only musically. I tell my students, and students in workshops to: practice, practice practice and enjoy playing music - explore it, have fun!

Lance - Looking back, what are some of your most rewarding collaborative experiences?

Susie - Too many to name. Currently I am collaborating with Pulitzer Prize poet Yusef Komunyakaa on a new chamber opera, I just finished composing, Shangri-La. And the workshop performance will be conducted by Cuban composer and conductor Tania Leon - this has been an amazing experience.

Lance - "Free" music is one of the most abused terms around. How would you describe what you do to a friend not necessarily in the music scene?

Susie - I might say Creative Music. Also Avant-Garde in the true essence of the word, not as in any style - you that word has been coined for styles now, believe it or not. Experimental - but it also depends on which ensemble I am playing with - my trio is electro-acoustic experimental music - also with a chamber vibe. My quartet is jazz. And I have a Filipino trip-hop band too, S.I. Electric Kulintang, in which I explore the nature of trance music and its relation to grooves.

Lance - More recently you've done work with Thurston Moore and Yo La Tengo. What's gotten you interested in the rock side of experimental music? Do you plan to do more collaborations outside of the "jazz" / experimental world?

Susie - It was a pleasure to work with these musicians - they are very unique and have developed their own personal concept. I enjoy always trying new things.

Lance - Who do you think is making interesting music these days? Who do you listen to and think "wow, that's something else"?

Susie - I was just talking recently about something similar to your question. If we look back on the 20th Century, it has been so groundbreaking in many ways. Even just looking at the arts - it has been revolutionary. I ask the question - where has this left us today in the 21st Century? Where are we taking this culturally, artistically, and what is the intent and ideas behind it? I have many questions that I am wondering about. For me, I enjoy both ancient traditional music, formed genres and styles as well as experimental and totally new music - I think Duke Ellington summed it up once stating - There are 2 kinds of music. Good Music and Bad Music. I think this is true.

Lance - In the underground rock scene, there have been huge changes in the past few years as far as attitudes towards women and Asians both as participants and as audience. Do you feel like there have been many changes in your music scene? Do you feel like you are still part of an uphill struggle?

Susie - I think for an artist, regardless of what minority, it is always an uphill struggle. It is very difficult to be an artist in this society - As for gender in music, I think that today's generation has gotten slowly progressively better, I do think that, and I am optimistic, but it takes effort and time. I think we all play a role in society, even if you think you don't, we all do. Each of our actions, our intentions, our reactions, and our energy, I believe, projects into society at large. And we can help to make a change to help to put positive energy out there. I guess I do believe in the individual, and that each one makes a difference.

Lance - Was Mephista in any way a response to that? How did Mephista form?

Susie - No, not at all. Mephista is a collective band that formed because of the music. We have been together for 1 and 1/2 years and we all met in NYC.

Lance - Are there any future plans for work with Mephista?

Susie - We just came back from a 3 week Europe tour in April and two festivals Victoriaville /Canada and Angelica / Bologna Italy last weekend. We will be recording a new CD for Tzadik this summer, which will feature all three of our compositions as well as improvisations.

Lance - What's next on your agenda?

Susie - I will be down in Houston playing 2 concerts at Diverse Works May 30 and 31 with Pauline Oliveros and Dave Dove. Then a CD release June 5 at Tonic NYC, for Pauline Oliveros New Circle Quintet -my new chamber opera, Shangri-La, will be workshopped and have a workshop performance debut on June 14, 2003, in Trenton NJ, at the Mill Hill Playhouse, produced by Passage Theatre. And I will be performing this summer with my trio in Seattle Earshot, Vancouver De Maurier Jazz Festival, Ottawa Jazz Festival, and - We will record a new CD in Sept - and I will record my quartet in November you can check my website, susieibarra.com as my performance dates are updates - I will be touring in the US with my trio in Oct and touring in Europe with my quartet and trio in Nov and Dec.

You can find out more about Susie and her many cool projects at these sites:

www.susieibarra.com

Tzadik - 61 East Eighth Street pmb 126 - NYC, NY 10008

Metro Youth are one of the great unknown bands of the late '70s / early '80s peace punk music scene in Britain. Before the onslaught of Discharge influenced thrash, their sound was more related to the early punk of the Damned or especially the X-Ray Spex, the latter influence largely due to their use of saxophone to help de-

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they became Sanction to further their journey into somewhat avant-garde music to go with the avant-garde thinking. This interview was done with Rich who was with the band through all of it's incarnations.

Lance - How did you folks meet? How did the band form? Were there many like-minded musicians in Exeter in 1979? How old were you at the time? What made you pick that name?

Rich - The four original members of Metro Youth were all at the same school, Hele's School in Exeter, Devon. Three of us were in the same class.

We'd all started

there in 1977, and pretty quickly realised that we were all drawn to and excited by the music of the Pistols and the other bands that we started to hear about. We all listened to the late-night John Peel programme on Radio One (the only national music show where this music found an outlet to begin with) and swapped tapes and shared records and started to read the music press. There was a punk rock 'in-crowd' that we were never really accepted as a part of, but we just got on with our stuff regardless, and there wasn't much in the way of animosity, at least from other school punks.

Nigel was the first to make the move to start a band, and once I'd found out that he got himself a drummer and guitarist (neither of whom were at Hele's), I realised I'd need to buy a bass guitar if I was going to become a member of XLR8. So I bought one, for forty quid. That's the only reason that I ended up playing bass — whatever it took to be in the band. We all piled into Nigel's garage in what must have been late-1978 or early 1979 for a few rehearsals, but — literally — none of us could play a note or hold or beat. I'd bought the first Clash songbook, which we all tried to decipher, but we couldn't work out how to make chords on the guitar, or how to match them to notes on the bass. I remember we did this very spartan and weedy version of 'Police and Thieves' and that we wrote a crappy 'Borstal Breakout' rip-off before we realised that this was going nowhere.

XLR8 packed up, and within a couple of months Metro Youth came together during a series of rehearsals in

Easter 1979. We were all either 15 or 16 at the time. I was 15 myself.

When we started we didn't really know a lot of other local musicians. There had been a spate of 1977 Exeter punk bands, including The Scabs and The Fans, but we only knew about them by reputation, really. There had been a couple of other short-lived bands at our

school, but it was only later that we really connected with the local scene, such as it was.

We talked and talked about

possible names for ages, and, for a time, different versions of 'Victimize' and 'The Victims' were in the front running. Eventually, 'Metro Youth' emerged as the name that everyone disliked least. I'm reminded, re-reading one of our old fanzine interviews, that drummer Andy came up with it. I suppose, not very subtly, we were identifying ourselves as 'urban youth', which, considering we lived in a small town in the rural south-west, was an odd choice. I didn't like it much then, and I can't say I like it any better now!

Lance - How did you learn to play your instruments? Is it true that none of you could play when you first started?

How do you teach yourself to play? Certainly the horn player could play...

Rich - We learnt to play our instruments through trial-and-error and experimentation. It is absolutely true than, when we started, none of the original four members of the band could play anything — at all. We knew nothing about guitar tuning, yet alone song structure or key shifts. For the first few weeks, everyone in the band tried their hand at everything — drumming, guitar, bass and vocals. We all just moved around, and started making a horrible racket afresh each time. What eventually got us moving (like so many other bands since the dawn of rock'n'roll) was working out cover songs, by playing along to records that we liked. The first recognisable songs to emerge from our cacophony were things like 'Mongoloid' by Devo, 'Where Were You?' by The Mekons and 'Law & Order' by Stiff Little Fingers. Looking back on it now, what began to turn things around was the emergence of Andy's natural talent as a drummer. Once his technique started to reflect that, my dead simple bass playing helped to give us a solid rhythm section, and the confidence to start writing our own material. It's become something of a cliché, but it's no less true for that — one of the hugely important things about the emergence of punk, was its message that you could be a part of it if you got stuck in, and its insistence that enthusiasm and commitment was what mattered. It's very clear to me, looking back on it, that the fact that we couldn't play really didn't concern us at all. We just were not put off by that. We wanted to play, and

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knew that it would come together somehow if we picked up those instruments and got on with it. After that, our ability to play developed almost beyond recognition in the couple of years that followed.

Listening now to some of the live and studio recordings, I'm struck by how much better we got, and how quickly. With Heff and later Brian joining in 1981, the situation changed. Heff was already an accomplished clarinet player and saxophonist. She'd even been a participant in the BBC 'Young Musician of the Year' competition one year. She picked all our stuff up by ear, and kept her sax parts pretty fluid and improvisational. She was good enough to do that and have it work. Brian was a talented guitarist, who we'd got to know from various local bands he'd played in. Tim, our existing guitarist, was an effective riff-pounder, but he was more than happy to play rhythm guitar to Brian's lead.

Lance - How did you first hear of punk rock? How did you get into the Crass stuff?

Rich - The first time that I can remember being aware of the existence of 'punk' was reading the headlines about the Pistols in the tabloid newspapers on my paper round in 1976-77. But it wasn't until I heard the music that I

really started to sit up and take notice. I read the British music weekly *Sounds* each Thursday, and it was in there that Garry Bushell wrote the first ever national music press report about Crass, announcing the imminent release of 'The Feeding of the

5000'. The record and Crass sounded amazing, so I sent off to Small Wonder and had a copy of the first pressing of 'Feeding' by the following week. I can remember that it took me a few listens to get into the whole of it, but that I loved 'Do They Owe Us A Living?' from the first time I heard it. There were a handful of incredibly significant punk records that sounded like no-one else had ever sounded before, and changed what you thought about punk. 'Realities of War', the first Discharge EP would be

one, and 'Feeding' was definitely another. Next, I bought the 'Reality Asylum' single, and started to get more and more interested in the anarcho side of punk.

Lance - What were the early gigs like? Was there always a following for punk and anarcho type stuff from the start? Were there ever confrontations with other non-punk types?

Rich - Gigs were always extremely hard to come by. Our first gig, in a church hall in 1979, was pretty shambolic, until the encore when we started to pull things together at last. Once we'd got a grip on our nerves and had a few shows behind us, we played some pretty good gigs, I reckon — including a No Nukes benefit at the university; a headlining slot at the Rougemont Festival in an Exeter park; and the major support slots that we got. We had a small local following, but it was hard to build anything because the scene was so weak. There was never an 'anarcho-punk' scene in Exeter, at that time. But, remember, Metro Youth was not in the straight anarcho-mould anyway.

What was certainly true was that Exeter punks had little enthusiasm either for local bands, or for bands that they didn't already know. One example of that would



be the reception that The Ruts got when they opened for The Damned at the Routes club in Exeter in 1979. Metro Youth people knew Ruts songs, because we'd taped the sessions the band had done on the John Peel show and couldn't wait to see them. But this was in the days before their Virgin signing, and to most Exeter punks, turning out to watch The Damned, they were unknown. The Ruts did blistering versions of classic songs like 'Sus', 'You're Just A' and 'Babylon's Burning' and other numbers from what

would become their first album, and most of the audience just stared at them in blank indifference. Our lot clapped and cheered but The Ruts went down pretty badly overall. Of course, then a smacked-up Malcolm split his head open on a cymbal and had to be hospitalised at the close of 'It Was Cold', but that's another story... The Ruts played again, at the same venue to a fuller crowd once 'Babylon's Burning' had charted, and that time the place went

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sort of mentality made it hard for local bands, and not just Metro Youth, to win a hearing. As for trouble at our gigs, there were only a few instances of that, and — Whitestone apart — nothing major. I later encountered much more trouble at various Crass, Poison Girls and Flux gigs. There's nothing quite like being punched in the side of the head to the sound of 'Fight War, Not Wars'! Exeter itself wasn't too bad a place in terms of street hassle or violent hostility towards punks, at least by comparison with other places we got to know.

Lance - Did you organize all of the early gigs on your own? From the start you seemed to be committed to DIY ideals. What were some of those gigs like?

Rich - We were quite committed to the DIY ethic from the outset. It seemed self-evident to us that was what the punk thing was all about — getting off your arse and doing it yourself, and making things work. At the same time, we didn't have much choice about it, a lot of the time. DIY was often the only way to go, if you wanted something to happen in somewhere like Exeter. Later that became as true for our fanzine and political work as much as our music. In terms of the band, we later on got help from organisers like Len Gammon and the Stagger Lee promoters.

Lance - Talk about some of your recollections of the gig at Whitestone Community Centre. Were you surprised that the punks trashed the place? How did the other bands who played feel about it? What were the feelings at the time?

Rich - The Whitestone gig exposed our naivety big time. It had seemed obvious that self-organisation was the way to go — no-one in town would let us book a punk show, and all local punks were moaning at the lack of any action. We hired the Whitestone Community Centre, a few miles out of town, booked a bill of local punk acts and laid on transport there and back. Tickets were 50p (inclusive of the coach fare) and we pretty much filled the bus on the night. The Centre had tried to cancel the booking at the last minute, once they'd learnt that Whitestone would be full of 'punk rockers', but we gave all the guarantees under the sun and they finally relented. In our naivety, we hadn't given much thought to 'security', and in the end, we just couldn't protect either ourselves or the building from the attacks of a minority of the audience, who trashed as much of it as they could, attacked us when we tried to intervene, and who had no interest in what any of the bands on stage were doing. That night ended any illusions

we might have had that punks felt an innate 'common cause', were automatic allies or all looking for the same thing. We felt let down, betrayed and well pissed off. The other bands on the bill were sympathetic, including The Drop (who we became good friends with, and who wrote great songs like 'Arcadia' which never got recorded before they split), but my recollection is that we were seen as 'the organisers', and pretty much left to get on with it.

Lance - Who was Len Gammon? Was he in any way a manager for the band? Did you come into contact with him

through Catharsis or the other way around?

Rich - Len Gammon helped out Metro Youth in a number of different ways, but in no way was he a manager for the band. We never had a manager. Metro Youth would have been opposed to the idea in principle, and Sanction would never have entertained the idea for a minute. Len ran the Catharsis rehearsal studio, put on a gig for us there in March 1980, and engineered our first ever four-track recording (the only one I don't have a copy of). He also put in a lot of 'good words' for us around the place. We all liked Len. Catharsis was used by pretty much every local band around 1979-1980. It was an old warehouse on the banks of the River Exe on the edge of the city centre. It was pretty tatty and basic, but there were few noise restrictions, and we liked playing there. It's where Brutalised was worked out! The funny thing about booking Catharsis was that you could never get Len to answer his phone. When you did manage to book a session, there was no guarantee that you'd be able to rouse Len at his flat when you went round to pick up the key. You might get a rehearsal, you might not.

Lance - How many different demo recordings did the band make? One at ESR and two at Catharsis? Did you ever sell any of them at gigs or mail-order? What was it like recording those tapes?

Rich - As Metro Youth, we did those three studio recordings — one at ESR and two at Catharsis. On top of that we had two live tapes, taken through the mixing desk at our two largest St Georges Hall gigs. We distributed versions of all of them to fanzine editors and the like, and a couple of tracks from the live stuff was taken for various benefit compilation tapes. The Catharsis tapes were way better than the ESR one, even though we knocked out the Catharsis ones on a stripped down four-track while the ESR session was done in a professional studio. Inevitably, the Catharsis recordings captured the immediate, raw, un-doctored noise. The ESR tape smothered and neutered all that edge. We didn't know enough at the time, I think, to recognise how much we'd been mugged by the production on the recording.

Lance - In the article you wrote for Year Zero, you mention the gig with the Bodysnatchers more than once. What was it about that gig that made it so pivotal for you?

Rich - We were a small, local band, struggling to find an audience and get outlets for our work, and The Bodysnatchers show was a chance to play a big local gig with a proper PA and light set-up. We were really excited

about it, because it marked a step up for us — the chance to play to an audience of a several hundred, rather than a few dozen, with the possibility of a useable live recording taken from the mixing desk. I have to say that we weren't that interested in The Bodysnatchers. I seem to remember that we thought they were OK, but I'm sure we didn't own one of their singles between us. We were a pretty straight down the line '77-style band at the time, and hardly the ideal support for them. The fact that we got offered the gig is a reflection of the poverty of Exeter's local music scene in 1979 — an up-and-coming all-female ska combo, and Metro Youth were the nearest thing there was in the way of a possible support act. I don't remember them saying a word to us all night. Tenpole Tudor, who we played two support slots with in 1981, were much more friendly and interested, Eddie Tenpole in particular.

Lance - At what point did you get in touch with Crass about "Bullshit Detector 2"?

Rich - We sent off a tape in the hope that we'd be

considered for Bullshit 2, as soon as we learnt — from one Crass handout or another — that they were starting work on compiling a second volume.

Lance - How did you know them? Was this still back in '80 / '81 around the time you recorded that demo?

Rich - None of Metro Youth knew Crass personally at that time, and none of us had yet seen them live. This would have been in late 1981, when we sent the tape in, I would think.

Lance - What were your impressions of Crass and that scene in London at the time?

Rich - It should be said right up front that the scene wasn't just found in London. That was true even of what Crass themselves were doing. By 1981-1982, Crass Records had signed artists from as far afield as Rochdale, in the north of England (Andy T) and Dunfermline in Scotland (The Alternative). Crass's interests weren't restricted to some narrow London 'scene'. But, more than that, anarcho-punk, as a movement, established important bases way beyond London, and across the country.

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places as far apart as Bristol in the south-west, in Birmingham in the west midlands, in Sunderland in the north-east of England and in Dunfermline, around what The Alternative were doing. Anarcho-punk also found an important footing in Belfast, in the north of Ireland, around the Anarchy Centre (which both Crass and Poison Girls played at). Of course, loads of important stuff was centred on London, but don't get the impression that London was where anarcho-punk stood or fell. Our knowledge of things like the Anarchy Centre, the early London anarcho-gigs, the anarcho-squat scene and all kinds of other things only came from record sleeves,

anarcho-handouts and bits that we could glean from the national music press. Our knowledge of what was going on elsewhere around the country came from fanzines, letters, visits and visitors. To us, stuck in Exeter, where things were so sluggish, what was cracking off elsewhere always sounded really impressive and exciting, but a world away from where we were.

You have to remember that prior to the impact of punk, there was no network in place for the distribution of independent records and publications. Seminal punk records like SLF's 'Alternative Ulster' and The Ruts 'In A Rut' took ages to circulate as far Devon. The distribution deals just weren't in place. It was really difficult to get hold of stuff. A lot of the time you read about bands whose stuff you had no chance of getting hold of. The first time

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that I went to the Rough Trade shop in London, sometime in 1981 or thereabouts, I couldn't believe that they had — as well as this amazing collection of punk vinyl — folders stuffed full with punk fanzines, that you could browse through and pick from. That was a revelation to me. To realise how large and diverse the fanzine movement really was, and just how many titles there were. There were a smattering of gigs in Exeter and in Bristol (about seventy miles north), but we felt completely off the beaten track in many ways.

Lance - What kind of stuff were you listening to at the time? Though it doesn't sound like ska, the saxophone does have a bit of a ska via Lora Logic kind of feel. What bands do you feel like you related to at the time?

Rich - We always listened to a massive range of stuff. The original Metro Youth foursome didn't have that many records to start with, but we all raved over the original 'Live at' and 'Farewell to' The Roxy albums, and loads of the early Small Wonder releases, as well as 'Bollocks' and the first Clash LP. We all loved the UK Subs, Stiff Little

Fingers and The Ruts too. As well as that, we were variously into people like X-Ray Spex and 999. We also rated more consciously political bands like Crisis, The

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Pop Group, The Gang of Four and The Au Pairs. Our tastes were pretty diverse. Nigel, our vocalist, was really into reggae artists like Black Uhuru, Misty in Roots and Linton Kwesi Johnson. Tim, our guitarist, loved trashy stuff like The Anti-Nowhere League, and bubble-pop like The Rezillos. Drummer Andy liked bands like The Damned and The Stranglers. He liked all kinds of bands (punk and not) who were really proficient at what they did, and could play their instruments. At the time, our saxophonist, Heff, really liked Lora Logic, and I know that that was a big influence on the way that she wrote for our songs. I was very much into the anarcho thing, but I never

saw it — in musical terms — as an exclusive thing. I would buy Conflict and Cockney Rejects singles at the same time. I liked Sham and The Upstarts. I never looked to them for politics, I just like the punk rock noises that they made. I treated them very differently to the way that I approached anarcho-punk.

Lance - What led to the band splitting up at the end of '81? Were there personal tensions? Did either of the two guitar players go on to do anything else?

Rich - Metro Youth came apart at the end of 1981, at the moment when things were going better than they ever had for the band. We had a whole bunch of gigs set up for early 1982, but Tim, our original guitarist, was moving to Plymouth to go to art college, and our new lead guitarist, Brian, decided for personal reasons to pack in playing music completely, and we failed to persuade him to stay. There really weren't any personal tensions in the band. If we'd have kept one guitarist, I'm sure we'd have carried straight on, but, losing both, we just stalled!

Lance - Who was Phil Hedgehog? Was he in the band? Was that a pseudonym for someone in the band? I know that there was some connection with you folks and *Peace News*...

Rich - Phil Hedgehog was, at that time, a young anarcho-punk from the Forest of Dean (just west of Bristol) who started writing to us after buying an 'Obnoxious' fanzine at the massive 1981 CND rally in central London. Over the next couple of years, me and him became the best of friends, and he came to stay in Exeter a fair bit. Phil, who never became a member of Metro Youth or Sanction, was — and remains — a brilliant cartoonist and graphic artist, supplied loads of cartoons and drawing for 'Catalyst' fanzine, which me and Heff produced between 1982-84, and did all kinds of illustration work for Sanction. He was very much involved with what we were doing. Phil also produced his own fanzine 'Radical Hedgehog', which, with its entirely hand drawn contents, was pretty much unique in fanzine circles at the time. Phil was one of the organisers of the second Exeter Crass gig in September 1984, and contributed the spoken-word track 'Radio Times' to 'Bullshit Detector 3'.

Lance - What exactly was "Obnoxious" about? How did you get involved with the zine and to what degree were you involved? Who was Clem Page?

Rich - 'Obnoxious' was an Exeter based anarcho-punk fanzine, put together by the then fourteen-year-old Clem Page who we got to know when he approached us for an interview. Clem was seriously talented and articulate for such a young kid, and various members of Metro Youth got involved helping him out with his fanzine, and him with 'Catalyst'. Me and Heff, in particular would write things, help out with interviews, print pages, but it was always Clem who edited the thing. Despite his appalling spelling and hit-and-miss typing skills, he did pull together quite an impressive fanzine, particularly with the later issues. It sold pretty well at local gigs and demos — relatively speaking — local fanzine print runs would be in the low hundreds at that time. It's not much of a surprise looking

back on it now that Clem, who was very advanced for his years in many respects, suddenly took off in a new direction, almost overnight, abandoning his punk and anarcho interests. Nothing we said could convince him that it didn't have to be 'all or nothing', and he quit our circle and scene completely. Of the fanzines of the time (1980-1982) Obnoxious certainly held it's own.

Lance - What other fanzines did you help out with? What made fanzine culture such a priority to you back then?

Rich - Me and Heff put together the first issue of 'Catalyst' fanzine in early 1982, with help, from the very beginning, from Phil Hedgehog. We also met with and swapped materials with Higgs who published 'Never Surrender' in nearby Bideford. Phil Hedgehog began to produce his own fanzine 'Radical Hedgehog' in Coalway in the Forest of Dean from 1983, and we had regular contacts with other south-west fanzines editors, including Tim, who we'd known from Exeter Youth CND, who went on to produce 'Children of the Revolution' in Bristol where he settled. But we were also in contact with dozens and dozens of other fanzine producers across the country, and we put a lot of effort into that 'postal network' of producers. We'd send out 'swap' copies to names on a list, and then pick out a handful more from the reviews sections of those zines and do the same again. We got to know quite a few fanzine editors pretty well, and visited them or had them come to stay with us. Some of the better fanzines were really excellent. Why did fanzine culture seem so important? I suppose we felt it was equally as important as the music — another forum for the message, another conduit to people, another voice for what we saw as 'the movement'. It was also something that anyone could do to get involved. If you didn't have enough friends to form a band, you could put out your own fanzine by yourself — hand-written in block-capitals if need be. If you could only afford to print 30 copies, then fine, do exactly that. Fanzines were another expression of the DIY ethic. After a time, many titles tended towards the formulaic and ritualistic, and the law of diminishing returns started to set in. But by best of the early 1980s titles — works like 'No New

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Rituals', 'Acts of Defiance', 'Kind Girls', 'Joy of Propaganda', 'Cool Notes' and loads of others — were very effective for a time.

Lance - What was "Catalyst" fanzine all about? Was it mostly politics or did you write about bands as well? What were your aspirations with the fanzine and why did you stop doing it?

Rich - 'Catalyst' fanzine was a political publication from front to back. We did do features on music, but it was a pretty straight down the line anarcho fanzine. Quite a lot of the early issues were all but illegible, and, reading them today, chock full of semi-literate sloganeering and 'stream of consciousness' stuff. They got better. We could only afford a few photocopied pages, and the rest had to be

run-off on hand-cranked duplicators using wax covered stencils punched out on a typewriter. The quality of the finished print was crude at best, and scrunched-up and ink-splattered at worst. Things did improve with later issues, and our design and writing skills picked up as well. We would have features on companies like Rio Tinto Zinc, actions like Stop the City, law-and-order issues in Northern Ireland and — something which became the overriding priority for us — the struggles taking place against the deployment of Cruise and Pershing nuclear weapons in western Europe in the mid to late 1980s. We wrote a lot about actions we took part in, air bases we visited, peace camps that we stayed at, and the strategies and tactics of 'non-violent direct action', including blockades, fence-cutting, and occupations at places like USAF Greenham, Alconbury and Molesworth. We might also include an interview with *Dirt or Conflict*, but we'd also have regular 'punk *really is dead*' features, slamming the state of 'the movement', railing against the limitations and blindspots of its politics, but also urging on that movement to realise what we saw was its very real potential. The last 'Catalyst' was produced in January 1984, and a few months after that I joined the collective producing the fortnightly *Peace News* magazine in Nottingham, and so left Exeter for good.

Lance - Do you feel that Sanction was a continuation of Metro Youth? Had Metro Youth evolved musically or lyrically over its two year existence or were you still doing the same basic set as the start? What were some of Metro Youth's other songs? Do you feel like you were heading in a more political direction towards the end?

Rich - Sanction certainly felt like a continuation of Metro Youth to begin with. Sanction started out with four Metro Youthers in it, and we continued to play quite a few Metro Youth songs

at the outset. Metro Youth's own music style had developed quite a bit over the two years of the band's existence, or at least it had diversified. We were still producing straight-out punk numbers, but also more complex and unorthodox stuff as well, examples of which would be songs like 'Utopia' and 'Equality'. Sanction began as a much more political project from the outset, reflecting changes in where we were at individually and collectively. In the summer of 1983, Sanction got a house together on the outskirts of Exeter, where we could rehearse without disturbing the neighbours, and all of the songs that we started to work on were political ones in one way or another. Heff had intended to move into the house as well, but in between the folding of Metro Youth and the launch of Sanction, she had formed the two-piece feminist combo Toxic Shock, featuring Al on bass and vocals and Heff on sax and vocals. The two bands did do some work together, releasing a joint demo tape amongst other things, and Heff contributed to the first Sanction studio recording, but with Toxic Shock based in Birmingham, Heff eventually decided to stay put, prioritise Toxic Shock, and quit Sanction. Toxic Shock subsequently toured with Poison Girls, gigged with Conflict and many others, and released material on the Birmingham based Vindaloo Records,

before calling it a day. This meant, among other things, that Sanction were pretty quickly a three-piece. We were definitely a political punk outfit from the very start. **Rich** - The Sanction house was, in reality, a 'holiday cottage', sat at the far end of a large field that it shared with just one other house at the opposite end. It was set back from the road, surrounded by trees and backed onto fields of sheep. It was outside of town, but you could be in the city centre in forty minutes, if you took a leisurely walk down the canal tow path, passed the 'Double Locks' pub that became our local. It was pretty idyllic in many respects. We hauled our instruments and duplicators up there, set up a shared house, bathed in the summer sunshine and hung out at the pub on the canal. It was toughest for Andy, because he was holding down a job in town, and having to haul himself in to work in the mornings, while me and Nigel were unemployed, but it worked fine for several months. When the winter came, things turned a lot grimmer. We froze. This was a summer building. The cottage walls were paper-thin, the roof wasn't insulated, and there were icy draughts blowing everywhere. No matter how many logs we burned, it was impossible to heat the place. We had to rehearse in coats and gloves. With Sanction making no headway in Exeter, Spring seemed a long way off. We gave up the cottage in the end not because the band fell out about living together, but because it wasn't worth investing in a place that was basically uninhabitable for half of any given British year. 'A nice place to visit, but I wouldn't want to live there'.

Lance - When Sanction started, were you still doing Metro Youth songs? Once the "Bullshit Detector 2"



came out, did you feel obligated to play "Brutalised"?

Rich - We did rehearse Metro Youth songs as Sanction, and also recorded a couple of them, but only a few from the set. Most of the Sanction stuff was fresh. We would not have continued to work with 'Brutalised', 'Red Rifles' and the like if we'd not have wanted to.

Lance - How did the release of that record affect the band? Did you notice any sort of broader audience due to the record? Why was there such a huge gap between you recording the song in 1980 and the record coming out in 1982?

Rich - By the time that Brutalised came out on 'Bullshit Detector 2', Metro Youth had been wound up. That was simply a product of the length of time that it took Crass to prepare the compilation for release. Choosing from amongst hundreds of cassettes, and then mixing the selected tracks and preparing the artwork from the band's own submissions did take a while — which is hardly surprisingly when you think of how much work Crass had on at the time. It was Eve Libertine who we liased with mainly, as she had taken on responsibility for 'Bullshit 2'. She told us, at the 1982 Exeter gig, that ours was her favourite track on the LP — and I like to think that she didn't say that to every band she spoke to.

Lance - Did you not want to submit a Sanction track instead?

Rich - The timing would not have worked out. Tracks had already been selected before any Sanction material was on tape.

Lance - Did Sanction do much recording at the time? How many demos did you do and did you were any available to the public?

Rich - We recorded two tapes. The first was a eight song demo, recorded at a new studio on Queen's Street in Exeter on 20 August 1983, when we were still a four-piece. The second was a recording of our only live show in Exeter in May 1984. We circulated those mainly through the fanzine network, and to the people who were continuing to write to us because of 'Bullshit Detector 2'. Quite a few tracks appeared and re-appeared on benefit compilation tapes in the UK and US at that time, like 'Inner Ear Damage' (a Californian release) and 'Alternative South West' (put together in Devon). In the decades before CDs, all DIY punk compilations were on tape, and the humble cassette was the always the weapon of choice of anarcho-punk. On 'Have a Nice Day: Volume 4', put out by 'Caution' fanzine in late 1983, for example, Sanction appear alongside bands like The Subhumans, Chumbawamba, Passion Killers and Faction. I've got four or five such

Sanction-included compilations on my shelves, but I know

there were a fair few others. You didn't always get sent copies of what people had done!

Lance - You mention that your involvement in "Bullshit Detector" led to organizing two Crass gigs in 1982 and 1984. Were they both organized by Sanction, as Metro Youth had been over by then?

Rich - We ended up organising the first Crass gig by accident, really. Patrick, one of the local promoters from Stagger Lee, had been putting on a series of punk gigs in the city. Stagger Lee had given Metro Youth support slots in the past, but we were becoming more critical with how Patrick, as an individual, was putting gigs together. We were red-hot on the question of anti-commercialism and the DIY punk ethos, increasingly defining ourselves by anarchist politics, and were very concerned to hear that Patrick had got Crass to agree to play live in Exeter in 1982.

To cut a long story short, we were very concerned that someone with no interest at all in the politics would be organising and potentially profiting from the Crass gig. All our correspondence with Crass up until then had been through the PO Box in London, but Anna-Joy David, a YCND organiser, had given us Crass's home address at a meeting held to launch a YCND group in the city. We wrote to Crass at Dial House to warn them of our concerns with Patrick, and a few days later Andy Palmer rang me up and asked if we'd be willing to put the gig on ourselves instead. We said OK, although we'd never meant to offer ourselves as alternative organisers!

That first gig was put together mainly by me, Heff

and Graham, a local CND organiser and activist, with various friends and other CND people helping out on the night. The second gig in 1984, I only agreed to organise after a visit to Dial House to talk through my concerns about Crass's live performances in late 1983 — a front-to-back rendition of the 'Yes Sir, I Will' album, which me, Phil and other friends had endured at a hideous gig in Birmingham that December. I had major criticisms of the route Crass were taking live, although I completely understood the frustration that led them in that direction. My view was that 'Yes Sir, I Will' was a stunning record (and that's still my view today), but — performed in its entirety — it just did not work live. The short version of the story is that Crass decided to rework their live performance (though not because of what I said to them!) for what became the final tour, in the spring of 1984. In light of that, I agreed to put on the gig. This was then put together by me with help in the week of the gig itself with anarcho-punk mates, from Peterborough, Newcastle and Phil Hedgehog. So neither were really Metro Youth or Sanction gigs. The first was a split benefit for Exeter CND and the magazine *Peace News*. The second was a joint benefit for Alconbury and Molesworth peace camps.

Lance - What were those gigs like? What was it like working with Crass? Did they take over the event or were they laid back?

What was the atmosphere like?

Rich - There's a lot I could say about both those gigs, but



I know that Crass thought of both of them as examples of successful shows, and were really pleased both we how we put them together and with how they went off on the night. Crass and the brilliant PA crew that they used both times were incredibly efficient and well organised from the moment that they arrived, getting the gear set up and transforming the insides of the hall (decked with banners, TV and projection screens) and sound-checking in the matter of a couple of hours. That sense of focus and concentration was completely understandable, but it meant that it wasn't really until later in the evening that they had the time to relax and chat with us a bit more. I can remember feeling a little put-out at the time, initially, that they weren't more friendly and interested in what we were about from the off, but I think, if anything, we were being a bit over-sensitive and not making allowances for how much work they had to get done to get the thing ready.

In the end, Crass were pleased with how we had organised the evening, and seriously happy to be fed and watered and looked after properly. I think at a fair number of gigs they had gone hungry and neglected, and were left trying to pull things together themselves on the night. They even beat us to doing the washing up, and Andy took 'our' recipe for home made soya milk back to Dial House with him. Crass did entirely 'take over the event', and I think that was what partly surprised us to begin with. But that was the way of working they had developed. That's what the experience of being on the road, trying to put on the kinds of shows that they were doing, had taught

them was necessary. Crass sent us handwritten 'contracts' for both gigs, which might surprise some people. I'm sure that came from a combination of being rip-offed by promoters and let down by inexperienced and overwhelmed young punks. Crass gigs were pretty large events, and when we were pulling together the first one me and Heff were just eighteen. Our experience of organising up until then had been pub gigs. Both gigs I can safely say were absolutely electrifying, although I spent both evenings charging about everywhere sorting things out, so I didn't get to see all that much in the way of interrupted performances. We had arranged security staff (paid and volunteer) for both nights, but we did it in a low-key way, as agreed with Crass — and frankly, there weren't enough people to call on if things had turned seriously ugly. We monitored things really closely as a result. As it was, there wasn't any trouble to speak of on either night.

To talk about the first one, it's still struck by how much the atmosphere changed over the course of the evening. To begin with, it was a memorable sight to see dozens of black-clad punks slouched in groups on the floor in the main hall watching the 'Choosing Death' film show. It

didn't feel like 'a gig' at all at that point. Later, as the place filled up, the mood was more tense, the room more packed, and, as Annie Anxiety performed, there was a real 'edge' to the atmosphere in the place. But that, I think, was just as much a reflection of the intensity of the evening, and of the contents of the performances, as it was an indication of the intentions of the crowd. These performances demanded a reaction from the audience, and you could feel that recognition in the air. Then Crass came on, opening up with an excoriating version of 'How Does it Feel?', which launched them into a powerhouse set. They took total charge of everyone's attention from the off.

I'll never forget the 'turning point,' the moment when we knew we'd made it. It came when Crass, knocking out 'Big A, Little A' got to the section: 'if you don't like religion, you can be the anti-christ.' Steve Ignorant delivered the next line, 'if you're tired of politics, you can be...?' and then turned his microphone towards the audience, inviting. Hundreds of voices bellowed back, on cue, 'an anarchist!'. As the drums and hacking guitar powered back in, me and Heff threw our arms around each other laughing, because we knew, at that moment, we'd pulled it off. It wasn't that we thought that the three-quarters of the 600-plus audience who'd yelled it, meant it. But it did mean that the audience were 'up for it' and willing Crass on, on the night.

Another brilliant moment came right near the end of the set. Crass were closing with the inimitable 'Punk Is Dead' and the whole front section of the audience had taken up the closing chant — 'punk is dead! punk is dead!' — and were yelling it back at Crass. Meanwhile, up on stage Ignorant and Andy Palmer, shaking their heads, were insistently singing back at them, 'oh no, it's not! Oh no, it's not!' That was both really funny and really striking

all at the same time. It made me laugh out loud, but it also made all the hairs on the back of my neck stand up. It was a brilliant way of making the point, of forcing this issue — they were saying 'stop and think! Is there a future for punk or not? Does it mean anything any more or not?' Quite a moment, I thought.

Lance - What were some of the bands you were listening to at that time? Were you listening to a lot of the Crass type stuff or were you un-phased by that stuff?

Rich - We were listening to a whole range of stuff. I certainly was the biggest fan of straight anarcho-punk, and was listening to everything that I could track down. There were a lot of influences as well as that though — all sorts of things from reggae, Pil, Gang of Four, Au Pairs, Pop Group, Devo as well as traditional and new wave punk.

Lance - You were saying that Sanction only played one gig. What was that like?

Rich - We struggled so hard to find outlets in Exeter to play, it just proved to be impossible. There was no pub

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circuit, certainly not for the kind of stuff that we were doing, and nothing in the way of local club venues. We got to know another local outfit called Wounded Knee, who were pacifist and vegetarian, but who were more into the 'spiritual' side those beliefs, than the spray-painting, fanzine-publishing, state-smashing end of stuff that we were drawn to, and we agreed to do a gig together at The Caprice in Exeter in May 1984. By this time, Sanction were a three piece, with Nigel on guitar and vocals, me on bass and lead vocals and Andy on drums. It was OK, but it didn't really lead to anything else.

Lance - Why didn't you feel compelled to play more often? Why didn't you play the gigs you set up for Crass?

Rich - We tried really hard to play more often! This was not an attempt on our part to be 'obscure and mysterious', it was a reflection of the fact that Exeter was in 1983-84 a seriously tough place for anyone to get gigs, and a near impossible place for an agit-anarcho band like Sanction. Any leads that we got, just ended up going nowhere. We were stuck, living in our cottage on the outskirts of town, rehearsing and writing and existing as a 'correspondence band', sending tapes out, answering fanzines interview questions and getting songs included on numerous anarcho compilation tapes. We had more interest from punks in Italy than from Exeter.

As you say, an obvious thing to have done would have been to ask Crass to join the bill at one of their Exeter gigs. Even by 1982, the question simply did not arise. Earlier on, Crass would have, and did, include local bands wherever they played, but that inevitably meant that local bands with no interest in anarcho-punk about ended up performing under the Crass banner. Part of Crass's determination to retain complete control over the performance on any night, meant that the bill was agreed in

advance and included only thoroughbred anarcho-punk acts, most if not all already signed to Crass records. Metro Youth or Sanction were simply never asked, and I'm sure that would have been politely but firmly refused even if we'd have had the gall to ask!

We could have played with Poison Girls in October 1981 in Exeter, but we didn't find that out until the night of the gig, when they invited us to join the bill — but we some of Metro Youth were out of town. We'd asked for the slot before, but talked to the wrong people in Exeter CND who put it together. I really regret that we weren't able to do it in retrospect, but we carried out a cracking good interview for 'Obnoxious' fanzine with Poisons and Tony Allen before they went on stage. Both Allen and the Poison Girls were excellent that night. There were other possibilities — we travelled to a squat gig in Swindon, but there was no generator for us to use; we had agreed to organise a joint gig with Flux of Pink Indians in Exeter, but the timing didn't work out; illness forced us to cancel a gig in the north-east at the last minute — so we didn't have the best of luck.

Lance - Having only played one gig, how did people find out about Sanction? How did the word get out about the band? Was it mostly through demo tapes?

Rich - The core activists and enthusiasts of British and European anarcho-punk were all, in one way or another, connected — through the vast web of bands and performers and the interconnections of the fanzine network.

Hardly anyone in Exeter knew who we were, but the band was known about in the anarcho-milieu in this country and abroad. We publicised our work through fanzines, contacted people through the mail and had our songs included on DIY tape releases. Mail from 'Bullshit Detector 2' continued to come in for Metro Youth for a good couple of years after the release, so we'd write to people about Sanction. This was how we ended up working, and of the three of us, I had the most interest in following up on all the stuff that was coming in. All of us in the band shared the frustration of not

being able to do more, but I know that for Andy and Nigel, there was even less going on with the band because of that. The chance to correspond with fanzine editors in France and Germany about what we were and weren't up to, felt like a poor compensation for our inability to get out there and do it on our home turf.

Lance - It seems like the band formed right after Metro Youth split. What were the reasons behind the lack of productivity in the following years? Was it a conscious effort to keep a low profile for some reason?

Rich - There was a bit of a hiatus in 1982, following the end of Metro Youth, with fanzines, arrangements for 'Bullshit Detector' and organising the Crass benefit taking priority. Following the September Crass gig, three of us left Exeter to start college courses in Bradford, Birmingham and Nottingham. Each of us who went realised, for our own individual reasons, that we'd made a really stupid decision, and agreed that we would return to Exeter and re-launch the band in 1983. We first rehearsed again in

January 1983, when Phil Hedgehog came to visit us for the first time, and Sanction got properly restarted around April 1983. Did we aim to keep a 'low profile', or choose to be 'unproductive' for some reason after that? No, absolutely not. We'd have loved to have been able to do more, get more projects organised and be part of some larger local community of people trying to do similar sorts of work. But there was precious little to 'connect' to, where we were, and few opportunities to promote what we were doing. We certainly didn't seek some kind of cool obscure and underground status.

Lance - How serious were talks about the band doing a single for Crass? Had you been discussing the possibility with them?

Rich - Talks about doing a single for Crass were pretty serious, as far as I remember them. We last spoke with Penny Rimbaud about it at the 1984 Exeter Crass gig, and sent in a tape of Sanction material, which both Eve and Penny sent us encouraging comments about. I'm reasonably sure that we would have been invited to record one, if Crass had not packed up within a matter of weeks of that gig, at the end of the tour. Andy T, The Alternative and The Snipers all had tracks on 'Bullshit Detector 1' and then did singles on the Crass label. Omega Tribe did a single and an album after having a track on 'Bullshit Detector 2'. It wouldn't have been an unusual development at all. I'm also sure it could have transformed the situation for Sanction had we been able to do it.

Lance - You cite one of the reasons for the band's ultimate demise as being too isolated from the anarcho scene of London. Was there any sort of support for that kind of thing in your area? Did you ever consider moving to London?

Rich - There really was very little happening in Exeter in terms of anarcho-punk, and not that much in the way of punk more generally, at that time. One of the things that

we
hoped
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was that it would encourage people to get involved in things, and help kick-start a local anarcho-punk scene. At each gig, we arranged to have stalls — things like the local CND group, Exeter Hunt Sabs, Housman's Bookstall (a political bookshop from London), anti-police powers campaigners, and others, in the hope of getting punks interested and involved in things. At the 1984 gig, with Crass' agreement, me and Phil produced a booklet which we gave out to everyone coming into the gig — basically a call to get stuck in to the anti-nuclear struggle raging at the time; to become involved in organising events like the gig; and to contribute to getting things off the ground in Exeter. We had 600 people at the gig. We didn't get a single letter or contact in response to the booklet from anyone in Exeter or anywhere else, though there were a lot crunched up and on the floor by the end of the evening! That didn't necessarily mean that people didn't sign up for CND or Hunt Sabs that night, or contact Crass, but it didn't do much to improve our sense of isolation and

frustration with Exeter. That said, we never considered moving to London. It's just not something that ever came up. As I said before, anarcho-punk was never just a London phenomenon, and none of us were at all attracted to the idea of living there. I feel the same way about it today. It's an OK place to stay, but I consider it a foul place to try to live. The nearest strong punk 'scene' that there was by the mid-1980s was in Bristol, but it was based around bands like Disorder and we were never taken with the whole 'cider punx' or, later, the 'Riot City' culture either!

Lance - Were there any other reasons for the band splitting?

Rich - Devon, where we were, felt beautiful but backward. If you had transport, it was a pretty amazing place to live — with stunning coastline, woods and moorlands all within spitting distance of our house. We lived just ten miles from great beaches and forty minutes from the edge of Dartmoor, and we grew to love that. But the place was an insular and conservative backwater at the same time, totally separated off from where I consider 'the action' to be — musically, politically, culturally. Sanction just wasn't working, despite all the efforts that we put in to turn that around. We had to give up the house that we had been sharing, and that made it even harder to keep us all involved. By that point in 1984, our frustrations with anarcho-punk had reached a kind of breaking point. In all senses, it felt like time to move on. For myself, I wanted to be more engaged politically, and I wanted to write about politics outside the confines of the fanzine format.

I applied to join the collective producing *Peace News* magazine, which was then a fortnightly journal, reporting on and analysing nonviolent actions of all kinds against the 'war machine'. Mike Holderness, who was on the staff there, had been in contact with Crass as early as 1979, organising a gig for them in London and writing the brilliant sleeve essay for 'Nagasaki Nightmare', but there wasn't anybody on the collective who'd come to their politics through anarcho-punk. That was one of the reasons I got the job, I think. *Peace News* wanted a staff member who knew about and could reflect the voice of that section of their readership that were from that world. I moved to Nottingham in August 1984, and Nigel returned to college in that September, also in Nottingham. Andy stayed put in Exeter. That marked the end of Sanction. We did talk about organising a 'farewell' Sanction gig in Exeter in July 1984, but, given the reception we were getting from the place, it seemed kind of pointless to us really. Instead, we called it a day with a final mail-out to the people who'd written to us or written about us.

Lance - Are you in touch with any of the ex-members of either band? Are any of them doing anything in terms of music or art?

Rich - Me and Nigel were in touch while he was in Nottingham, and me and Heff swapped occasional letters for a while, but that was years ago. The producers of the 'Year Zero' Exeter punk compilation CD (released in 2000, which included 'Brutalised' from 'Bullshit Detector 2') assure me that Andy still lives in Exeter, but I don't know where. I've no contact with, or news of, anyone else, sadly. Phil Hedgehog moved to Nottingham and joined the staff at *Peace News* in January 1985, staying on the payroll until October. We're still best of friends this day. I

left the staff of *Peace News* in January 1987, although both myself and Phil helped out with writing, illustration and production work for some time after our quitting the paid collective. We've both been involved with all manner of British anarchist publications in the years since then.

Lance - How do you reflect on the old anarcho scene? Do you think it was all ridiculous and naïve? Or can you still appreciate the things you were doing back then?

Rich - No, I don't think it was all ridiculous, but, yes, much of it was ridiculously naïve. It's important not to overstate how wonderful it all was — some fanzines were shite, many anarcho-bands were worse, many anarcho-punks turned up from the gigs, but would never turn out for the actions, and a lot of the political ideas informing those actions were delusional in the first place. But I'd want to defend a lot of what when on and what we were involved in too. I'd want to criticise the individualism and the blind pacifism of the movement, its lack of political strategy and its confused priorities. I'd want to point to the chasm which separated the claims of the movement from the reality of the movement's work, and much more besides. And yet, at the same time, many of the visions, aspirations and hopes articulated by that movement still seem to me the right ones. Anarcho-punk wanted to disarm and break the nuclear state, end the alienation of family life and the misery of wage slavery, free the earth of the exploitative parasites who plunder and threaten it, and create a new global human community, able to exist in peace, freedom and equality. You can attack anarcho-punk's efforts to execute the plan all you want, but I'm reluctant to criticise the sense of ambition! Personally, in the years since Sanction wound up, I've kept hold of the anarchism and vegetarianism, and let go of the pacifism.

As for as Metro Youth and, more so, Sanction go, I think we invested far too many expectations in it, and were constantly disappointed as a result. We could also be over-earnest, self-righteous and indignant about many of the things we did and said — me especially — but that kind of came with the territory, I suppose. But listening again to some of the old recordings, particularly the later Metro Youth ones, and some of the Sanction material we only taped at rehearsals, I am quite impressed by the kinds of things that we were doing and the material we were trying out. Three to four years before that, we really couldn't carry a note between us.

What are you doing now as far as music?

Rich - I currently play in the four-piece Nottingham punk band Pointy Boss. In 2001, my political activity isn't centred on music, and with Pointy Boss we write and perform material just because we like how it sounds. Phil Hedgehog helps produce our artwork, appears on the cover of our latest DIY CD and co-wrote the memorable number 'Toaster' for the band, but no-one else from the Metro Youth, Catalyst or Sanction days is involved with Pointy Boss.

Zounds is one of my favorites from the so-called anarcho punk scene. When they say existentialism, oh brother, they mean existentialism. We're not talking post-Joy Division landscapes of gothic alienation. We're talking about isolation in the mind AND soul, an almost anti-Castaneda in their autobiographical sketches of Thatcher's England (without ever needing to mention her by name). This first interview was done with singer/songwriter, Steve Lake.

Lance - How did you folks meet? What had you been doing musically before Zounds?

Steve - Zounds originally evolved out of a series of jamming scenes that took place between various groups of friends of mine. First of all we were based around the Reading area, which is where I come from.

Circumstances moved us to Oxford where we developed a very 'peripheral' lifestyle that consisted of a lot of jamming, a lot of painting and drawing, an enormous amount of dope smoking, and more than a passing interest in L.S.D. and psychedelia. None of us had jobs, we were unhealthily terrified of the police, and were unknowingly engaged in the process of transforming ourselves from happy-go-lucky, harmlessly mischievous teenagers into marginalised, paranoid wrecks who had become totally alienated from the 'straight life'. Musically we were involved in a lot of weird free form jamming that was influenced by everything from the Velvet Underground and Can to the Grateful Dead and the Byrds.

Lance - When did the band form? '79? How long was it before your first demo?

Steve - The first incarnation of Zounds must have formed and started doing gigs in 1977 or 78. Lawrence was around then but wasn't in the band. We didn't meet Joseph until a couple of years after that. The idea of recording demos never crossed our mind. We were absolutely alienated from the world of record companies and mainstream 'cultural business'. We were complete outsiders. I don't mean in the sense of some Hollywood RocknRoll leather jacket version of outsider. More in the

sense that we had become social cripples, barely able to function and interact with anyone outside of our particular bohemian cesspit.

Lance - Can you remember the first gig? Do you have any recollections of any of the early gigs?

Steve - Yes, the first gig was as a three piece and we didn't have the name Zounds at that point. We supported a punk band at a village rock club near Reading. At that point the line up was me on bass, Steve Burch on guitar and Jimmy Lacey on drums.

Then we added Nick Godwin on guitar for our second gig. This was at Oxford Polytechnic supporting Australian psychedelic fruitcake David Allen who had previously been in Soft Machine and Gong. We were still doing a lot of improvising and free form stuff at that point but they were really dynamite gigs, full of fire and power and energy. The Oxford Poly gig was the first time we played 'Can't Cheat Karma' and Steve Burch came up with that

great way of playing that riff. It was the best performance of it really. They were great gigs but you would have had to be there to get it I think. Tapes don't do those kinds of events justice.

Lance - What was it like recording the first demo?

Steve - We just didn't bother with demos. Despite our fragile, broken egos we were supremely arrogant and felt if the world deserved Zounds they would have to seek us out, we were not going to chase after anything. In our childish, fantasy world we regarded it as

inevitable that the world would beat a path to our door. And at first things progressed in that way. Our fourth or fifth gig was reviewed in the New Musical Express, which

at the time was pretty much the main voice of youth culture. It wasn't a great review but it made us think we were on the map and recognized. It wasn't really until we moved to London

and got Lawrence in that I started to think we were going to have to make a record and somehow pursue that notion, as nobody was coming forward to offer us the chance to make a record.

Anyway, after Steve Burch left and Lawrence joined, the band deteriorated terribly. We became directionless and plodding. It took us a lot of playing and a lot of gigs to get good again. Which we did.

Lance - Did the band always have a political edge or was

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that something that came as time went on?

Steve - Well my music and my songs have always been born out of my experience of living in and observing the world around me.

As I said, we were pretty alienated from mainstream society, and consequently mainstream politics, including traditional radical left politics. But our experience was that the world of work was oppressive, tedious and destructive and offered us nothing but drudgery and boredom. We had constant hassles with the police for looking like freaks; it was becoming really difficult to find affordable

places to live.

We really started to understand that we had 'no future'. At first we would not have even recognized this position as being political. But things were really hotting up in England during 1978/79. The 'right' were starting to exercise a lot of muscle and becoming noticeably and violently more of a presence. The National Front were gaining ground and the

Conservatives were following them to the right. Ditching the old post-war consensus and preparing the way for hard Thatcherite, Corporate, market economy.

At the same time elements of the police force were completely out of control. The S.P.G. in London, the West Midlands Crime Squad. Unemployment was rising and race relations were becoming a potent issue.

On top of all of this we were becoming aware of the massive build up of nuclear weapons by the U.S.A and the Eastern Bloc, which led to the reactivation of C.N.D. and various environmental groups. No sensible, intelligent person could fail to see what was happening and how bad things could become. We couldn't fail to become more politicized and see how political power was impinging on our lives.

That is why things like Rock Against Racism and the Anti Nazi League started. We started to see ourselves as enemies of the state just because of the way we thought; we weren't activists in any sense of the word. Yet we felt we were under attack by the forces of society. These things affected everything we did, how we lived, what we ate, who we slept with. And ultimately the songs we wrote and the way we played them.

We were never attracted to the organized left with its infighting and dogma and rules. We were instinctively drawn towards anarchy. Not because we had much of a

clue as to what it was about, but we just wanted to be left alone to pursue our own weird trip and not have people tell us what to do.

Lance - Who were you emulating in the early days? Who were your inspirations? Some of it reminds me of very early stuff by the Cure.....

Steve - The very earliest incarnations of Zounds were really in to psychedelic San Francisco bands. We were also in to Can, the Velvet Underground, lots of weird stuff, the early Mothers of Invention. The Byrds, the Beach boys, the Beatles. We were really into music. That was

always the thing with us. I really got into Patti Smith early on, things like Piss Factory. The early punk stuff that was inspirational was stuff like the Fall, ATV, Patrick Fitzgerald, Buzzcocks, and American stuff like Pere Ubu and Television. But we were never trying to emulate anybody; we were trying to find ourselves through music. It's funny you mention the



Cure because I got really into them after Zounds split up. I think Robert Smith was also kind of marrying the weird and unusual with a pop sensibility, which I think characterizes Zounds in many ways.

Lance - What were the early ambitions of the band? Was it a hobby or were you at all looking at it as a career? An art form?

Steve - I don't think we ever thought about why we did it. Career was a dirty word to us. Playing music was something we did like eating and drinking, breathing and shitting. It seemed to be a natural function. We played music all the time, even before we considered getting a formalized sort of band together. Mind you our life was like a 24-hour art workshop. When we were not playing we were painting, writing, clay modeling, making ecologically unsound plastic structures that we would set fire to and pollute our lungs, brains and living environments. People would come round to our house in Oxford and be amazed that every bit of space was covered in paint, paper, clay and musical instruments. It was such a groovy scene. Our life was our art, but we would never have seen it like that at the time.

Lance - Is there any story behind the name?

Steve - Steve Burch, our original guitarist found it in a dictionary. We always mispronounced it to rhyme with 'sounds'. It's an exclamation, a corruption of the phrase

'gods wounds' which we thought was appropriate at the time. Though I grew not to like it pretty quickly and am still not keen on it. Actually God's Wounds would have been a better name. I could start a Zounds tribute band and call it God's Wounds.

Lance - Did you think of yourselves as a punk band? Did you feel in any way connected to that scene?

Steve - We never saw ourselves as anything. But I personally felt very connected with the concerns of punk. The day Anarchy In The UK was banned and withdrawn by EMI I hitch-hiked 300 miles to buy a copy. It changed everything and at last people had the courage and audacity to just get up and say, yea we are fucked up, but it's our world too and we are going to do what we want, even if we've got no resources. It wasn't unprecedented but at last people were sitting up and taking notice.

I was never into the rammalama identikit punk thrash sound that soon took over punk and was very tiresome and unimaginative. What was good about it was just the scenes that started up all over. The metropolitan London glam-punk scene was nothing really. Just the usual old trendy, fashion crowd trying to get their pictures in magazines. That is the current official media history of punk, that it was all about these London trendsetters. But there were more interesting things happening at the margins as usual. Us in Oxford, the Mob in Somerset, The Astronauts in Wellwyn, The Instant Automatons in Hull. A whole load of weird, idiosyncratic bands creating their own lives and scenes and music.

Lance - How did you hook up with Rough Trade?

Steve - That's kind of getting ahead of the story a bit. We had gone through a lot of stuff before we hooked up with Rough Trade.

We had met the Mob and had done a couple of tours with them and some other bands. And through them we met Joseph. We met the Mob at a thing called the Dursley Seventh Vale festival. And a guy called Jonathan Barnett put a tour together with us, The Mob, the Astronauts and the Androids of Mu. We all kind of were on the fringes of the Here & Now free music scene and were under the influence of their ex-drummer, a guy called Kiff-Kiff who was an amazing guy and went on to limited fame in England with a band called World Domination Enterprises. He and Jonathan Barnett put together this outfit called Fuck Off records, and us and the Mob put out tapes and stuff through them. We all hung out round Ladbroke Grove and Shepherd's Bush. There were loads of gigs at the Acklam Hall and round West London. Then we did

these mad free tours. During which we met Crass and Zounds dwindled to just Lawrence and myself.

Lance - How did you get in touch with Here & Now? Were they already pretty well known in England? They were pretty much unheard of in the states. And what was your relationship to their peers like Gong and Hawkwind?

Steve - Well Here & Now were doing Free Festivals and free gigs and seemed to be much more politicized than other bands, this of course was slightly prior to punk.

There was a kind of radical hippie tradition that included Hawkwind, Gong, and The Pink Fairies centered around Ladbroke Grove. The Pink Fairies were influenced by the radical politics of The MC5 and Jerry Rubin and the yippies. A lot of future punks lived amongst this Ladbroke Grove hippie scene. Joe Strummer lived next door to Here & Now and there were people like the Slits. Everyone was getting into Reggae at that time and there was a lot of interest in Rasta.

Lance - Did Here & Now start the Weird Tales tours? Were they all free? How did you support yourselves?

How did a tour like that work on a practical level? How many bands would be on the road at any given time?

Steve - Here & Now championed the free tours and us and the Mob dug the idea and met each other through them. We carried on the free tour idea by starting the WEIRD TALES tours, Zounds the Mob and the Astronauts, and of course the legendary Jonathon Barnett who was an inspiration to us all.

Lance - Were there other punk bands other than Zounds and The Mob that were part of that scene? How many Weird Tales tapes were there? Were they all on Fuck Off Records? I know someone told me something about a bunch of real early live stuff on one of the tapes from Zounds and the Mob...

Steve - The Astronauts were a weird band who had a very punk sensibility but didn't play punk music as such. They still do a lot of do-it-yourself/fanzine type gigs. I sometimes play on the same bill as them at the more alternative venues we do. Us and the Mob were always big fans of the Astronauts and they were the other main band on that scene. A lot of the other bands were kind of noise terrorists, like the 012 who later became World Domination Enterprises. Yea all those early tapes were on Fuck Off records or one of its illegitimate offspring.

Lance - Joseph only slightly hinted at The Brougham Road scene. What's the story there?

Steve - Zounds lived in Brougham Rd which was a



squatted scene peopled by old anarchists.

They started to move out so we moved the Mob in and soon after came hoards of teenage runaways and the whole thing deteriorated as these things always do. It was really no different to all the scenes all over the country/ world.

Lance - And as far as pivotal gigs, yeah, any info would be great. I really don't know anything about that.

Steve - The Acklam hall in Portobello Road was a legendary gig and Zounds and the Mob and the Astronauts did loads of free gigs there. That was where we really got it together as bands.

A short tour with Crass and Poison girls and Zounds in 1980 really inspired me. I realized we were just fucking about until then. It really made me think a lot more about how we should be on stage. Zounds always loved playing in Holland and Belgium most though and the best was playing in 1981 in Berlin in the heart of the anarchist/ squatting quarter called Kreuzburg. They were brilliant gigs, fantastic audiences and we were really happening on stage at that point.

Lance - According to the Crass website, you met them when your tour vehicle broke down outside of their house. Is there any truth to that story? How did you first come into contact with them?

Steve - While on tour we kept playing places where Crass had just played or were about to

play. And people kept saying we should meet them because they detected some sort of similarity in something.

So we were playing near their house and we thought we would just visit them. But our bus broke down and we walked to their house across this weird submarine tracking station and they entertained us, we got on like a church on fire and they came and fixed our bus.

They liked us, though I think they saw us as quite naive, naughty children who had their hearts in the right place.

Lance - What led you to decide to do your first record with Crass?

Steve - The night we met there was talk of doing this and that together, the way these things go. But nothing much more than talk. But Lawrence and I decided to do a demo and send it to them. Apart from meeting Crass that last 'Weird Tales' tour had been grueling. The Mob split back to Somerset and Zounds lost a guitar player (Nick Godwin) and decided to chuck out the drummer. After we did the demo we asked Joseph to join, he had followed the Mob up to London but didn't follow them back. Joseph had been playing in a mod band at the time but we liked him and knew he was committed to playing music. He sort of looked like a punk too, which Lawrence and I didn't. Anyway Crass liked our demo and asked us to do the record on their label.

Lance - How connected were you to that band and their scene? Did you gig with them a lot?

Steve - We were in a different scene entirely. Much more untogether. We were all a quite a bit younger than most of Crass. Us and the Mob, the Astronauts, the Androids of Mu, Here @ Now, the Fuck Off Records crew, Grant Showbiz (who went on to produce the Fall and Billy Bragg and work for the Smiths). There were gigs on the

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Portobello Road, Ladbroke Grove. A lot of free festivals (which is another huge story in itself). Crass and Poison Girls were quite insular and very much in control of their scene.

After the record came out on Crass we did some gigs with them. They were great live. Especially when they had all the video monitors and banners and stuff. But actually it was more like a cross between some dubious political rally and a dark Brechtian theatre. Much better than on record.

But our scene was less earnest and less developed. People coming to our gigs were kind of more bohemian than a lot of Crass's audience. Other squatters and hippified punks. When we got our record out it expanded the audience, and outside

of London there was a lot more working class

kids who lived with their parents coming to the gigs. **Lance - How did you get along personally with people from that scene?**

What are your recollections back to those days?

Steve - Well I was tremendously impressed by all the people in Crass. They were really funny, very intelligent and had very powerful personalities. I admired their analysis and commitment and knowledge. But generally I remember just going round to their place and chatting about stuff and having a laugh. I liked them a lot, and am very fond of my memories of them.

Lance - Do you think there was ever any sort of feeling of competition among the bands?

Steve - Ironically there was a very strict hierarchy in the Crass camp that was acknowledged but accepted. Crass at the top, Poison Girls were their second in command and Zounds, Flux and the Mob were favored subjects. But in all honesty that was about right because Crass were phenomenally popular far beyond the Anarcho scene. Their significance has never been fully realized to my way of thinking.

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Outside of the Crass thing when we were gigging a lot with the Mob their was a lot of sharing and co-operation and working together. But I think there were definitely less benign forces at work below the surface. There were definitely jealousies and petty backstabbing going on. But I prefer to remember the good things, though that can be difficult sometimes.

Lance - What was the recording of the "Can't Cheat Karma" single like? It was a bit weird. We did it at Southern Studios, which was owned by Crass's business manager John Loder. At that time the studio was in his house and the control room was in the garage.

Steve - Was there any pressure internally or externally to conform to a sound or style of Crass? They chose the songs from our repertoire. We played it and Penny and John did all the recorded and produced it. To some extent they directed the performances, particularly my vocals. Crass the band, and the Crass label were both Penny's babies really. He was the man with the vision. They made us use a

session drummer who played Joseph's part. That was

difficult to take as authenticity is quite important to me.

After the recording they mixed it without us there and brought it to us for approval.

Lance - How was the cover art decided? I kind of like that all the Crass stuff had the circle on the cover. But it is a little weird that they would dictate so much about another bands' cover art...

Steve - Crass were a band who wanted things done a certain way. They had a vision and they were not into compromise. Which is not to say they were unreasonable, but if you wanted to work with them then obviously it was on their terms. Nobody forced us, or anyone else to do it. And anyway we liked them and dug what they were doing. We were happy to be associated with them. So they designed the cover, wrote the blurb and we wrote the songs and played them. Lets face it the main reason it sold so many was because of the association with them. If it had just come out anonymously maybe it would never have been heard.

Ironically I think that Crass were an early example of what is now very fashionable and significant in western culture. And that is the whole total corporate identity. They were one of the first to have that sense of 'total image'.

Lance - Is it true that you had recorded "The Curse Of Zounds" long before the first two singles were even released? What was the reason for the delay of the album?

Steve - No that is not true. We did Can't cheat Karma then we did Demystification at the same sessions we did The Curse Of Zounds. I think when I was putting the cover art together I was so stoned I put the wrong year on it.

Lance - What can you say about the way the label was run back in those days?

Steve - Geoff Travis made all the decisions about who was signed and what was released. They tried to run all other aspects of the company like a workers co-operative. Which led to all the usual decision making problems most workers co-ops seem blighted with. Plus the banks wouldn't deal with them in the way they would with a 'normal' client. Which led to cash flow problems. Geoff was an absolutely beautiful guy who I still admire and respect very much. I used to get a bit intimidated by the others though. Even the warehouse staff seemed far more trendy than us and use to regard us with something like disdain.

Lance - Who did you deal with mostly at Rough Trade?

What was your working relationship with them like?

Steve - We dealt with Geoff mostly, Pete Warnsley who is also a very nice guy and possibly runs Rykodisc now. The publicity guy we dealt with was an American called Scott Piering who I think hated us. He went on to work with the Smiths and do P.R. for novelty records I think.

Lance - What was the recording session for the first album like?

Steve - Very short. We recorded the whole thing in four days and did a day or

so of remixing.

We had a guy engineering called Adam Kidron, he was the millionaire son and heir of the Socialist publisher who owned Pluto Press. He was really funny and we were very naive and impressed by him. He talked us in to giving him producer royalties when we didn't even know what royalties were and we thought we were producing the album ourselves. We recorded the album in the order we wanted the tracks on the final album, though we did revise the order slightly. I thought it was really important that it was a coherent record where the track order had some sort of internal logic. Adam hated guitars so we ended up with a far less powerful guitar sound than

we would have liked. We were a guitar band after all.

Lance - Next you recorded and released "Demystification" which

still came out before the album. What was the reasoning here?

Steve - We recorded 'Demystification' and 'Great White Hunter' at the end of the

album sessions, by which time I think we were starting to get the hang of it. I would have liked to have started the whole thing again at that point. We never wanted the single on the album. Partly because of my slavish devotion to rocknroll folk lore. When I was a kid the Beatles

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and Stones and such groups never put singles on albums. We associated it with the rip off tactics of the music biz.

Selling the same thing twice. I always thought singles were cool and something different from albums. I don't know why it came out before the album. Probably something to do with Rough Trade's clever strategic marketing policy, which also remained a mystery to us.

Lance - You've been quoted as calling the b-side (Great White Hunter) as "the Velvet Underground meet white liberal guilt". Do you think you were often a little self-conscious about the anarcho politics or the anarcho scene?

Steve - Yes definitely.

I can't remember whether it was Joseph or I that came up with that, but we would both have shared that point of view. We were nothing if not self aware and self-critical. A lot of my songs tended to be about striving and failing and not making it, not being brave enough, not being able to live up to ones own expectations.

Lance - What was recording that record like?

Steve - Yes well it was all part of the same sessions as the Curse Of Zounds so it was the same really.

Lance - What was the story behind the cover art?

Steve - Lawrence is very visually oriented and the concept was his. Just the idea that we are all 'mystified' and can't see what is really going on in the world. So everyone is blindfolded except for the central figure who is tearing off their blindfold and has a look of horror at the harsh reality of life. We trooped off

down to Kings Cross Station with a friend of ours called Googy Pete who was to be the Demistified star. We stood him on some sort

of plinth and took the shot. When Lawrence did the artwork painting the blindfolds on to the crowd it became apparent that Pete didn't have the right expression on his face. But in the corner of one of the shots was me making the right sort of face in an effort to will Pete to do it right. So Lawrence got busy with the paste and scissors and put my head on Pete's body. A situation neither of us would have liked in real life.

Lance - Then Rough Trade finally released "The Curse Of Zounds". What were your feelings about the record once it was out in the public?

Steve - We thought it sounded great when we did it, but as soon as it came out we went off it I think. We thought the guitars weren't big enough and it was all a bit lightweight. When we first met Geoff at Rough Trade Joseph told

him we wanted to sound like the Dead Kennedy's and I think we would have been happier with that sort of powerful sound. In retrospect though I think it is probably better the way it is. But I'm speaking as someone who feels they have heard enough rock guitar to last several lifetimes. That's why I no longer have a guitar in my band.

Lance - This is one of the densest and most claustrophobic albums I've ever heard. It also captures the feeling of paranoia without ever saying the word. What

was your state of mind when you were working on the record?

Steve - Well paranoid is definitely a word that rings true with me, I think I have always been a paranoid person, and I don't mean that metaphorically. I think I really do have clinical paranoia. For example I never fly (which means I will probably never return to the USA even though most of my family live there). I almost always avoid going in lifts, I hate the underground (subway) and many other things of that nature. I have always been terribly fearful of the police, though I have never really been involved in

anything illegal. I am also something of a hypochondriac and worry like mad when my kids come home late. So in many ways it is no wonder

that this tends to surface in my music.

Claustrophobic is a great word to describe the album. And that's the way I felt at the time. I think that is why I responded so well to going to Berlin. The way it was this small island surrounded and walled in by an 'alien regime'. I still have tremendous nostalgia for the cold war. I know Joseph does to. It's not because I think the cold war was good, but because it echoes my state of mind.

When we did the album I felt we were existing in our own little world, closed in and only in contact with similar scenes dotted randomly around Europe. I hated it when we were thrust into contact with the wider world. Every-

thing seemed hostile to me.

Not just the big global things like nuclear war, government corruption, corporate greed and media brainwashing, but even the everyday world of supermarkets, family life, little

Hitler bosses, aggressive and insensitive teachers.

I think that really comes through in the writing on 'CURSE OF ZOUNDS'. The way in something like 'THIS LAND' I try to take the narrative from the big global issues of ecology, pollution and environmental breakdown to the very personal, microcosmic, local world of the streets in which we walk and live.

'MY MUMMY'S GONE' is similar in that it is about the anguish and fiction of monogamous, nuclear family life expressed through a very personal experience.

'TARGET'

wasn't just a tirade against nuclear war, but about the effect of the nuclear build up on people who

had to live near the bases. It was a very significant feature of Zounds songs that the so-called political issues and social landscape was always related to the everyday ways in which we lived. I think that's the attraction for many people of Zounds, that it is not just sloganeering, but is born out of the frustration and powerlessness we actually felt (and still feel) everyday, and how that affects our personal behavior and personal relationships. I love the songs of American folk singer Woody Guthrie for much

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the same reason. Though of course I would never compare my own limited talents to his inspired genius. As Leonard Cohen said of Hank Williams, "he's 100 floors above me in the tower of song". Probably thousands of floors actually.

Lance - Did you see the record as a chance to expand on the Zounds concept (if there was one)? It's an especially cohesive record that really puts you in the Zounds world.

Steve - Yes, we wanted it to be cohesive. We tried recording it in the order we wanted the tracks to appear, which is what happened with one or two slight changes. It had to start with 'FEAR' as it set the whole context for the rest of the album. As you pointed out it is the worldview of someone blighted by paranoia, and the rest of the songs are very from the perspective of someone scared shitless by everything. It ends with 'TARGET/MR. DISNEY' and a snatch of 'WAR' (re-titled 'THE WAR GOES ON'). Because what ever was going on was existing in the shadow of the impending Nuclear threat and U.S. cultural and military imperialism, in particular the positioning of cruise missiles in the English countryside. At the time this was of massive significance in Europe and we all felt very close to the issue. Many people believed that we were heading for a nuclear catastrophe and so it was very much an overriding concern at the time. Ending the album with the reprise of WAR and letting it fade out in full flight was just to emphasize that war was not just an historical fact but an ongoing aspect of the human condition and that we shouldn't forget that and needed to do something about it fast. The revised title refers to a song Scottish folk singer Donavon used to play called 'The War Drags On', I don't know if he wrote it but I liked it a lot. It might be a Tim Harding song, I'd like to find out actually.

Lance - What was the reception like to the record when it finally came out?

Steve - It got some good reviews and some not so good ones, but it didn't get us known much beyond the anarcho scene.

Lance - What was it like recording the record?

Steve - Weird but very exciting. We were pretty out of it most of the time but we worked pretty hard on it.

Lance - Did you do much touring to support the record? What kind of promotion did Zounds do?

Steve - We just tried to play all the time. Rough Trade's agents booked us some gigs but they were all wrong for us so we just got fans and likeminded individuals to book gigs at community centers and such places. We hated getting involved with music biz types and promoters and agents and the rest of the hangers on.

Lance - What can you say about Clifford Harper's cover art?

Steve - Love it. Love the joke and I have always been keen on comics so it was just right. Cliff had originally done it for a cover of a magazine called 'Anarchy' and redrew it for us. He did it during the fireman's strike of the late 1970's. We thought fireman were heroic in that they did a dangerous and selfless job and were drawn from well-intentioned working class people. I think he ripped off the concept from a cartoon in the right wing London newspaper the Evening Standard. Lawrence and I helped publish a book of Cliff's work and biography called 'The Education of Desire' which I still think is one of the best

things I've been involved with.

Lance - Many people think of the record as the pinnacle of the band's career. Would you agree?

Steve - Well there was no peak for me. We never made a record I was really happy with. Our live gigs in Berlin were the experience that has stayed with me more than anything else from the Zounds period. My favorite Zounds record is Demystification.

Lance - Next was the single "Dancing" b/w "True Love". What made you decide to add keyboards at this point?

Steve - Well I wrote Dancing on a friend's keyboard. It wasn't even meant to be a Zounds song. Jonathan Barnett from Fuck Off Records asked me to do a solo thing for a tape he was putting out called "Folk In Hell", which I'm told is quite sought after now.

When Lawrence and Joseph heard it they wanted to do it with Zounds and thought it would be a good single. When we played it live though it was very different. More like a kind of Neil Young and Crazy Horse tune. When Geoff Travis of Rough Trade heard us play it at a gig he was keen for us to do it as a single. We got Brian Pugsley, a friend of ours who lived in our house in Brougham Road, to play keyboards on it. We were keen to develop our musical ideas so we approached it completely differently and got him playing all that nice piano. As he was in the studio with us we thought he might as well play on 'True Love' as well. I have to say Joseph was completely against the whole thing. He was much more of a purist punk than us. We could have carried on churning out 300 mph guitar stuff like Subvert, but we were more adventurous than that. I'm not saying we were adventurous in the way Can or Faust were, but we didn't want to be an identikit punk band. Dancing is a very dramatic song and we wanted to conjure up that dramatic, dark, nightmarish and sad world of living in a fascist state. We wanted it to be Teutonic with a whiff of Berlin Cabaret about it.

Lance - "True Love" is in some ways your darkest song. What provoked the song? Was it a critique or was there any degree of some personal situation being reflected?

Steve - As with most of these things it was a bit of both. It was a difficult time because we were all intellectually against sexual jealousy and possessiveness, but emotionally we were not very good at handling it. So while there was a lot of sexual freedom and experimentation going on, people were getting very fucked up about it. This coincided with my girlfriend getting pregnant and me having to face up to the fact that I was going to be responsible for another life. I wasn't really mature enough to handle it, and in fact I am still not, and I've got three kids now.

Lance - What do you remember about the recording of that record?

Steve - It was bizarre because it was going to be produced by Mickey Dread, a Jamaican DJ who was quite well known at the time and worked a lot with the Clash. He hardly ever turned up and when he did he spent the whole time on the phone. I didn't know that many Jamaicans at the time and I don't think I ever understood a word he said. His accent was so strong. We wanted to build up the drum track by laying one drum at a time so it didn't sound like traditional kit playing. Joseph despised this approach and walked out before we even got to doing "True Love".

In the end the drums on "True Love" were played by a guy called Tim who at the time was playing drums for the Mob, he was Mark's sister's boyfriend. He just came down the studio to check it out and ended up playing on it. It was an incestuous little scene at times. I wasn't there for the mix. My girlfriend's pregnancy meant she was under a lot of pressure from her parents to get married. So I did the decent thing any working class boy with my upbringing would do and ended up getting married on the day we mixed "True Love". No wonder I was writing an anti-love song. I don't think Joseph ever got it, it was supposed to be an anti-love song that sounded like a conventional poppy love song.

Lance - What about the cover art? What is it from?

Steve - That was great. Joseph drew it. I love Joseph's drawing. I don't know if he did it especially for the cover or whether I just saw it and thought it was great and really appropriate. We use to give out these posters that Lawrence and I made up by cutting up loads of covers and sticking them back together like a big collage. I ended up with thousands of the posters and I tried to get my kids to use the back of them as drawing paper. The trouble was my kids were frightened of the picture and wouldn't use them. In the end I threw them all away.

Lance - This was followed by your most upbeat record of all. "More Trouble Coming Every Day" seems almost light in it's delivery and '60s influence of the tune. Was this a conscious effort?

Steve - Well we got Brian to play keyboards on it again and it made it a lot lighter than the way we played it live. I liked the 60's pop feel of it. It's a bit of a clichéd chord sequence based on quite a common 4-chord turn-around. We probably did think it was commercial, but we didn't concoct it to be. It was just teenage angst really. I wrote it because I loved the phrase 'more trouble coming everyday'. The line 'the smell of burning...etc' refers to the riots that were going on in England's major cities at the time. More knowledgeable listeners would know immediately that I ripped off the title from a Frank Zappa song, which I think is on Freak Out, his first album.

Lance - What was the mood like with the recording of these songs?

Steve - Deteriorating. In an attempt to save the band Joseph suggested we get Tim in to play bass and I move on to guitar. So we did that and Tim was promptly sacked by the Mob for being in both bands. And then they asked Joseph to drum for them, it didn't seem to matter that he was now in both bands. Tim was a great drummer though, really powerful, not to take anything away from Joseph but Tim was a virtuoso musician who was great on loads of instruments. He was not only better than Joseph on drums

but he was better than me on bass and better than Lawrence on guitar. He did that one record with us and a couple of tours and then we split up. I never really considered him part of the band. He was just along for the ride. Zounds was just me and Lawrence and Joseph.

Lance - What can you say about the record cover?

Steve - Joseph drew the cover to "More Trouble" as well. I thought it really complemented the song, a scruffy bored teenager. The P.R.

people at Rough Trade hated it. Joseph really should have stuck with the drawing; he's good.

Lance - What made you do your next record on your own?

Steve - La Vache Qui Rit. By the time that came out I had pretty much lost interest in Zounds. It is undoubtedly our worse record, I wish in some ways it had never come out. Its genesis and history is actually more interesting than the record itself.

It was put out by a very, very good friend of mine who is a beautiful guy and still a close friend. Originally it was supposed to be a double release with us on one side and The Mob on the other, and it was supposed to be a benefit record for a draft resistance campaign in Belgium (my favorite country by the way). The Mob was going to do a version of "No Doves Fly Here" in French. That would have been good; Mark always had a lot of style for a farm boy. (In fact as I perform a lot of songs in French myself now I have considered covering it that way).

Anyway the Mob never got it together and I don't know what ever happened to the draft resistance angle. We went ahead and did it anyway.

Lance - The next record is a bit of an oddity. What made you decide to do half of it live with another version of "Fear"?

Steve - It wasn't planned. On our final European tour someone recorded

the gig in Leiden in Holland. And the guy who was putting the record out asked if he could put two live tracks on and make it an E.P. We just said do what you want. So he did. I was really ill at that point. Just exhausted by everything. We were cold all the time. We were staying in squats with no water and inhabited largely by speed freaks who never slept. The van kept breaking down. The whole Zounds/Mob scene was riven by petty jealousies, conspiracies and bad blood. I had just about had enough of it all. The song 'Wolves' on that EP was a really old song we had done before Joseph was in the band. Tim who played bass with us on that last tour and persuaded us to play it. God knows why. I was past caring:

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Lance - "Biafra" continues the poppy style started with "More Trouble..." Was this an indicator that the band was starting to head in different directions?
Steve - No, sadly the band had lost all direction at that time. We always had a bit of a pop sensibility. It was a fun song to play but I don't think it was so much fun to listen to. It was basically the riff from the Elvis Presley record 'His Latest Flame' married to my synopsis of a short story by one of my favorite authors Kurt Vonnegut.

Lance - The beginning of "Not Me" almost sounds like a cross between "Eight Miles High" and "At Home He Feels Like A Tourist". Do you think '60s pop and psychedelia was always a big influence on the band?

Steve - Yes that is an interesting observation. The riff was one of Lawrence's and I just put lyrics to it. I had never noticed the similarity to "Eight Miles High" before but I see what you mean.

"Eight Miles High" is one of my favorite records

and the Byrds are still one of the groups I listen to. I was really into 1960's psychedelia, in all its forms. A lot of people involved in Punk were into that. When Caroline Coon (ex manager of the Clash and founder of Release) said Punk was the hippie's revenge I don't think she was far from the truth.

Lance - Did you ever release anything else on Not So Brave?

Steve - No.

Lance - What was the story with the Italian singles

collection? How did that come about? Did it come out before the band split?

Steve - Just after we split. Rough Trade suggested we do it and they arranged the licensing. Joseph refused to have anything to do with it, which is why he is absent from the cover. It was supposed to be limited to 1500 copies, though I know a couple of distributors that took as many as 4000 each. They do things differently in Italy. It goes without saying that we saw no money from it.

Lance - When did you decide that the band was over?

Steve - On that final tour of Europe. Lawrence just said to me one day that he thought it was all a bit of a drag and he and I should do something else that was musically a bit more adventurous and a bit more fulfilling than churning out "Subvert" for ever more to people who really didn't want to hear anything different. Anarchists can be a conservative lot I've discovered. Flux Of Pink Indians had the same problem. I went along with Lawrence and when we got back we spoke to Joseph and it was clear he didn't want to do the same kinds of things as us and was much happier playing with his old mates from the Mob.

Lance - What were some of the reasons that led to this?

Steve - I seemed to be getting older and the audience seemed to be getting younger. The whole Zounds trip had

been so exciting and brilliant for me in the beginning but it was becoming a dull routine, and very unpleasant. We never had any money, my girlfriend was having a baby and I was musically very unsatisfied. I always liked loads of music, pop, country, psychedelia, Krautrock, just loads of stuff. The thing about the punk scene in the beginning was that it had been really open and fresh and interesting. But it had become stagnant and formalized and predictable. I had to move on in my life.

Lance - How did it end? Was there a final meeting or fight or did it just dissolve?

Steve - We were supposed to go to a gig in Colchester and none of us could raise the enthusiasm to actually go. We phoned them up and said the band had split up and we were not coming. Our name is still mud in Colchester. There was a bit of a falling out with Joseph after that, but it all got sorted out and I have nothing but respect and admiration for him and loads of fond memories of the times we had together. We still do the occasional gig together, in fact the last time we were on the same bill I sang "Dancing" with Blyth Power, which was great.

Lance - What made you first get into music?

Steve - I was seven years old or something and heard the Beatles on the radio and I was so overwhelmed I still haven't come down.

Lance - When did you first start to play an instrument? Was it bass?

Steve - Yes, when I was 16. I started playing in a rock'n'roll band, doing Chuck Berry, Eddie Cochran and Presley stuff in brothels and Speedway

club dances.

Lance - What got you into punk and the whole counter-culture?

Steve - I wanted to be a hippie but I was too young so when punk came along it just fitted in with our bohemian, anti-establishment view. I hitchhiked three hundred miles to buy Anarchy In The U.K. the day it was banned and withdrawn by E.M.I.

Lance - What were some of the records you listened to when you were a kid?

Steve - The Beatles, Bob Dylan, the Byrds, the Who, Tamla Motown, Hank Williams, Johnny Cash. I always liked the good stuff.

Lance - Were your parents in any way interested in music or art? Were they ever encouraging about Zounds?

Steve - I was abandoned to my grandparents when I was five. My mother went to live with her family in the

U.S.A. She was a dancing teacher. My dad ran a jazz club. He took me along once to see a New Orleans jazz band when I was about 6, that was probably a key experience. He introduced me to the band and it just seemed such a great thing to be in a band. But ultimately I

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didn't have much contact with either of my parents.

Lance - Are you born and raised in Oxford? Do you think being from there and not from London helped or hindered?

Steve - I am from Reading. It was a market town with a cowboy mentality. Now it's a bland software based shopping mall type of place. I had to come to London because it was and is the centre of many things I love and hate.

Lance - What do you think was a pivotal point in your life that made you decide to play music?

Steve - Meeting a brilliant guitar player called Terry Small when I was 15. He and a drummer were trying to get a three piece heavy blues band together like Cream. We got on really well and he said I could play bass in their band.

He said it was easy as their were only 4 strings and they were so big you couldn't miss them. I got a bass and the rest as they say is history.

Lance - What are your 10 favorite records of all time?

Steve - Hardly a day goes by without me thinking about this question (which I know is silly, but to be honest I'm a bit of a jerk). The list changes everyday but some of the ones I always consider are;

WATERLOO SUNSET - THE KINKS
FAMOUS BLUE RAINCOAT - LEONARD COHEN
KENTUCKY AVENUE - TOM WAITS
ANTARCTICA STARTS HERE - JOHN CALE
PALE BLUE EYES - THE VELVET UNDERGROUND
STRAWBERRY FIELDS FOREVER - THE BEATLES
I'M SO LONESOME I COULD CRY - HANK WILLIAMS
ONLY THE LONELY - ROY ORBISON
MAN OF THE WORLD - PETER GREEN'S FLEETWOOD MAC
AMERICA - SIMON & GARFUNKLE

Lance - What do you do for employment these days?

Steve - I still play music. I don't make much money at it though so like the great jazz musicians that went before me I do a bit of pimping.

Lance - Are you college educated?

Steve - Eventually.

Lance - How many solo records did you do under your own name?

Steve - Three. Two in the 1980s and one released on my own label which just came out (summer 2001). The latest one is called THE BACTERIA E.P.

Lance - Do you think your solo career was as artistically satisfying as your career with Zounds?

Steve - I've always been artistically unsatisfied. Though what I am doing now is finally getting close to what I want to do. For years I found Zounds cringing-ly embarrassing, but I have come to terms with it more now.

Lance - How long into Zounds was it that the Mob started? How close were you with them?

Steve - I think we met in 1978. We toured with them, lived in houses and buses with them, had the same drug dealers and slept with the same people. Despite that we were never really close.

Lance - What was The World Service?

Steve - It was the name of a band that Lawrence and I formed with original Zounds member Nick Godwin. This was immediately after Zounds

split up. We released one record called "Celebration Town" on Rough Trade. The B-side of that record was fantastic actually, it was called "Turn Out The Lights" and would probably been the next Zounds single if we had continued.

Lance - What was The Relatives?

Steve - That was a band I was in in the 1990s. It started off as a drab anonymous indie band but after a while we went acoustic and became England's greatest ever

country band. We had Eric Mingus (son of jazz legend Charles) on bass for a while. A very beautiful guy.

Lance - What made you decide to get the

band back together?

Steve - We never reformed. We just did a couple of benefit gigs for the McLible campaign. Dave Morris the defendant was an old friend of ours. I don't know why but I have a particular hatred of McDonalds.

Lance - Do you think that the band will continue from time to time now?

Steve - No. That is it. It would not be possible. I am a different person. I've learnt to love Zounds but I can never go there again, it just fucks it up.

Lance - Will there be any further recordings?

Steve - We did a benefit single for McLibel a few years ago, which as yet has not been released. It's a reworking of "This Land"; it will come out one day. I have a ropery tape of a gig we did for Vi Subversa's birthday which has some exciting moments, I keep thinking about releasing it but I don't know if anyone else is interested.

Lance - How do you reflect on today? Do you still feel you can get behind the lyrics and the ideas? How do you reflect on the music after all this time?

Steve - Well in a lot of ways it was the most exciting time of my life. We just had such great times. It all got a bit much by the end but generally it was a great time. Essentially I still believe most of the stuff and ideas that informed those records. I still am deeply suspicious of capitalism, Christianity and religion, consumerism, the family, the education system, the whole thing that in my childhood was called the military industrial complex. I wasn't as good a lyricist then as I am now. But the words had a simple, naive charm and they were from the heart. The music I am less sure about. There are some good moments, but we didn't really have much clue. If you stand it next to Can or Tom Waits or Captain Beefheart or the Byrds or whatever it doesn't really stand up for me. But it touched a lot of people so something must have got through. John Lennon said he was never a Beatles fan and I guess I am not a Zounds fan.

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MUSIC REVIEWS

A

A-FORMATIKONTACT CDR

An offshoot of Ausin's Attack Formation, Ben Webster has put his two cents in the post-rock, E music, nu new wave, kitty. While clearly in the vein if not direction of much of the mid-'90s Chicago scene, the post-Slint, electronic minstrels, A-Formatikontakt benefits from a much more organic approach steeped in a tradition of DIY recording. In other words, its punk because it's got hiss all the fuck over it. Do you know what I mean?

Hiss is a fucking beautiful thing. It's what makes something as academic and distant as Xenakis seem like the Nation Of Ulysses or Crime. There are many factors you could research out and use to justify the genealogical connections between the music. But the main point is in your face. It's the hiss motherfucker.

A-Formatik's whistles and snaps are a noise field of light almost precious in its construction and certainly subtle in its performance. The recurring rhythms including those from the bass are both mesmerizing and propulsive. It could be said that the low fidelity of the recording muddles up the sounds layered on the foundation. But the chaos is what maintains the unease that is the band's strength. (www.attackformation.org)

D

DEVIANTS, THE "Ptoof" CD

A lot has been made about the Deviants sucking as a band, you know, like that was part of their charm. So, I guess I was sort of expecting something along the lines of Germs ROIR cassette. Instead I gotta pretty raging garage punk record that seems like an especially challenging record for 1967.

I mean, there's quite a range of sound here. Some of the blues based stomps are like caustic versions of "Tombstone Blues". It's like if Dylan ever really wanted to kill a cop. Surely he must have. Why did he never come out and say it? The farther they wander from Dylan, the closer they get to "Waiting For My Man" or "Run, Run, Run" territory. In fact, if you love THAT side of the Velvets, you'll love this. I mean, wouldn't it have been great if the Deviants and the Velvet Underground really were the anti-establishment?

Mick Farren, of course, was a journalist for International Times and Oz. Giovanni Daddomo was a writer before he sang for the Snivelling Shits. So was Patti Smith before she got the Group. Lester Bangs and Richard Meltzer wrote songs. Some of the best films were made by people who started off as journalists (Goddard, Nagisa Oshima). Why don't more writers put their money where their mouth is? Fuckers! (Alive Records)

DILLINGER FOUR "Situationist Comedy" LP

Jeez, this may be the punk album of the year. I can't stop listening to this record. Got a big parcel of nice gifts from

Fat including the NOFX singles collection and the new No Use For A Name and while they are all very nice and more than enjoyable it's the Minneapolitans that I can't stop listening to.

Thirteen songs with not a dull moment, how rare is that in today's world of high-tech, low art punk rock? Each tune is catchy as hell and is as thoughtful as it is naive. Rarely does a band utilize two very different (sounding and stylistically) singers to such great effect. I think they both sound great and it really varies up a record that could easily have turned from pop genius to pop punk mundaneness. Faintly evocative sing-a-longs sporadically arise helping the forward motion of the music rather than bogging down with an Oi-like football chorus.

I've never heard of a studio called the Terrarium but now I wanna know. This record is produced like a motherfucker. Each song is like a punch in the face. Not like "I'm gonna kick your ass". More like "I'm punching you now and we'll have a beer later Fight Club-style."

Okay all you cynics – I'm a cynic too! Like there isn't enough poppy hardcore as influenced by Snuff and/or NOFX in this world. I'm with you. There is way too much of that shit. But Dillinger Four aren't out of nowhere. They aren't some wannabes rehashing a style so closely that they might as well be a cover band. No, this hits harder than almost anything else on the Fat roster and if you're too far gone to even see the value in that, well, I don't know what to say. If Albert Schweitzer couldn't figure out that too much of anything was a bad thing, than how can the average music nerd? (www.fatwreck.com)

THE DIRTBOMBS "Ultraglide In Black" LP

This record fuckin' rocks. I couldn't think of a better way to start my new year than with this pumping party album of classic covers fucked up and rocked out by the genius that is Mick Collins. I've been a big fan of this guy since the Gories and while this may just be done in fun, it's really hit a chord with me and a lot of people.

This tribute of sorts is largely remarkable because of Collins' rich vocal stylings. Using other peoples words and music as a vessel, he conveys so much emotion in a short pop song, it makes me wonder why no one else is able to even come close. There's an earnestness that shows whatever he's trying to convey is real. It is especially effective in his updating of Stevie Wonder's classic "Livin' For The City".

This record was built by the band's 10th line-up, which has a consistent sound as they still maintain the unique two bass and two drums attack. The sound at times is almost like large group recordings with Sun Ra. There's a weird order in the cacophony and it's seeming randomness in arrangement always somehow ends up perfect.

I've listened to this record a dozen times now and I still can't find anything wrong with it. (In The Red)

BILL DIXON "Odyssey" 6 CD box set

As I finally sit down to write this review, it's almost four months in 2002, the dawn of which this collection of music came into my life. After spending months saving up the cash to buy this box set (you think I'm making any real money off of this? Guess again!) and before that doing some research on Bill Dixon only then finding out that this limited, mail-order only item even existed, my need to own "Odyssey" became a red herring to the actual music (something a lot of record collectors can understand).

I wasn't sure how I exactly wanted to approach this review, as there are so many levels on which to discuss and enjoy the music not to mention the fact that it does completely span six discs. I'm leaving the background discussion of Bill Dixon and his approach to a later article, as I was fortunate enough to get an interview with him a month back. So, forgive me if this verges too far into Lester Bangs and not far enough into Robert Hughes.

Bill Dixon is like a National Treasure to me much like the Badlands, Death Valley or Robert Rauschenberg. Only difference is he's not being recognized for his artistry and integrity in the face of adversity. Suffice it to say that I've been a fan for some years now although I did come pretty late to his music. I was listening to most of his music decades after they had been made available. So, my interest has always been organic for the most part.

So, this six-disc collection of solo performances and spoken word dating back to the beginning of the '70s is like a given for me. I love Dixon's arrangements for small bands as well as orchestra. But his often-understated performing style is served well in these solo recordings. On this collection you are given a museum's worth of art, your own "permanent collection" to ponder and thoroughly explore. That's exactly what I've been doing.

I've really been living with this music for the past few months. I listen to it at home. I listen to it while I write (like right now). I listen to it on the bus to and from work. It's the soundtrack to my life at the moment. While I'm not suggesting that you have to do that to penetrate this audio tome, the pay off is well worth the journey.

"Odyssey" as soundtrack to your life: *détournement* was a tactic used by the Situationists in the '50s and '60s where by taking an established piece of (usually) commercial art, altering the slogans or dialog changes the intentions of the art and therefore turns the propaganda in on itself. Its effectiveness is reason why it's still a popular technique used widely today.

If you are, like me, of the disposition that most of society with it's personal racial profiling, psychic fascism and other alienating means is ultimately just a big piece of commercial art, then you may be looking for ways to *détourner* your own life. As "Odyssey" has become the soundtrack to my life, it has in effect altered the meanings of my surroundings.

Talk about fighting alienation with alienated means; this music is like a voice talking to you reminding you that

there are others paths not plainly seen. The aural cues and runes are mirrors with which to define in your life what is creative and what is destructive. As a soundtrack, "Odyssey" is kinetic deconstruction.

The incredible tones and sounds (some would call "skronk" but I'm trying to avoid that word these days) Dixon gets on these recordings are unlike anything you could hear in your noisy city-soundscape. You can't help but be intrigued by the other-worldness of the sounds and the vibrant textures painting a variety of emotional elements while filling completely taking advantage of your aural palette in it's solitude. His own rich tones are often wetted with effects that enhance the elements unique to this style of playing as well as its other-worldness.

"Odyssey" is the anti-Muzak: in audio versus visual experiments, it's clear that people pick up on audio cues more deeply than visual cues. That is why with streaming video, for example, if you don't have DSL or Cable, the picture comes through in bits and pieces. The capability only exists to send either the visual or audio signal clearly but usually not both. The Internet chose to send the audio signal clearly and it surely wasn't done on a whim.

If Baudelaire was right in calling work the salt that mummifies the soul, than it was only because he died before an entire spectacle existed to embalm us meta-physically. Muzak stuns reality in a miasma of simple lines and points. It's the equivalent of giving a math scholar a million basic addition problems to solve. The long-term affects are more serious then you would think.

Listening to "Odyssey" is the counterpoint to that. The reflective and occasionally angular arrangement of many of these pieces is pretty consistently challenging. In some ways, it can be a good yardstick in delineating art versus entertainment. Rather than be a lazy spectator, the pieces encourage participation on an intellectual level. Even the titles are evocative. Pictures and scenes are framed in your mind as provoked by the music. In this way, it becomes and intensely personal experience.

Now, this is just one angle that I'm coming from. I've spent a lot of time with this music as I was quickly drawn into it. To write a thorough review of this box set would take pages and probably a lot more music knowledge than I've got.

For me, this is great American art and just as much part of the art tradition as the Beats, the Abstract Expressionists, post-modernism, etc. Where "Odyssey" falls in order of importance within the creator's repertoire is certainly subjective. But it's very possible for me to think that this could be his "Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even".

(Bill Dixon, Inc Archive-Edition)

DUNCAN, JOHN "Phantom Broadcast" CD

Do you ever wonder what "Metal Machine Music" would have been if Lou was on Ecstasy instead of Meth? Did you ever feel like My Bloody Valentine would have been perfect if they had just gotten rid of the "songs"? Do you believe in

ghosts? Do you love a good hoax?

These are just a few of the reasons I came up with to buy this disc. John Duncan is a man with a short wave radio and a degree saying he can make it into art. This entire recording is allegedly a short wave found sound that repeats at a high velocity making a harmonic hum, a single tone from which much more is revealed... allegedly. Ever since the Ghost Orchid scam there has been a lot of blab about spirit voices turning up on electronic tape. Any good anarchist will laugh at that. Well, I've always been a bad anarchist and while I don't, uh, believe it... it certainly makes me a little uneasy for some reason only a very good analyst can tell us.

Either way, the medium is the message and it's beautiful. The ringing IS "Metal Machine Music" as a ballad. I at least would like to believe in ghosts. At the very least, I like it when art can play a trick on me.
(www.allquestions.net)

F

FEEDERZ "Ever Feel Like Killing Your Boss? CD
FEEDERZ "Teachers In Space" CD

I first remember hearing the Feederz on KTUH's punk show back when I was a kid. People just couldn't get over the song "Jesus Entering From The Rear" off of the "Let Them Eat Jellybeans" compilation album. It's funny that with a line-up that included Black Flag, the Circle Jerks, the Bad Brains and more, the Feederz (and Really Red) stick out more for me.

So, it's a brilliant coup that Broken Rekids sorted out a re-release of these two classic and sadly collector item records. Included along with most of the original packaging are the complete LPs showing the bands evolution as well as capturing the raw nerve of music that even now seems like "caustic" personified.

The neo-Situationist bent seems contemporary along the side of so many current bands (from grindcore to Shiner) that have to varying degrees shown an interest in the movement. Yet, their approach to the artist / audience dynamic (as is obvious with the record titles) is less about projecting a dystopian image and more about playing the trickster.

The result is a smart bunch of music that doesn't talk down to you and at the same time doesn't "dumb down" it's content. The music is solid '80s style punk rock. At times, there is a real garage element to it. Other times it is almost like improvisation. Generally speaking, it's amazing how memorable all of the tunes are. Though part of the charm is the low tech production (and I mean that only in comparison to the over-production of the last 10 years) this is not just an archival curio. These are classics and it's nice to see them back in circulation.

(www.brokenrekids.com)

G

GREAT CLEARING OFF, THE "Within This Inch, We Are Free" 7"

There's been a lot of cool stuff happening around the country lately, but who can really argue that Philly isn't the capitol of hardcore cool and has been for the past few years. In the grand tradition that brought the world Kill the Man Who Questions and RAMBO, comes the debut EP of The Great Clearing Off. Don't know much about these guys except that they're bent on destroying consumerism and they've read a little Shakespeare. Didn't Shakespeare have great contempt for the common people?

Anyway, this is a lively little hardcore record that sounds clean and while it may be a mode done to death, if it's done with enough spunk, that's great. Certainly good enough for me as most hardcore singles are just souvenirs of potentially great live performances. And what's wrong with that? Just because your record may never have the impact of your live show doesn't mean you shouldn't try. These kids are trying.

I should also probably mention that this seems to be the first release from Cheap Art Records that's run by Mike and Andrew from Kill the Man. It's all good news.
(Cheap Art Records – PO Box 2101 – Philadelphia, PA 19103)

I

SUSIE IBARRA & ASSIF TSAHAR "Home Cookin'" CD
SUSIE IBARRA TRIO "Songbird Suite" CD

There are so many reasons to be a fan of Susie Ibarra. Not only is it nice to know that there is a younger generation of jazz players coming from a still adventurous position while being able to keep up with the more established names. But a female, Asian American drummer? Much props – there aren't too many role models in any category...

Susie Ibarra, for those of you too punk to know, is the explosive 30 something drummer who has spent a good part of the past decade playing with folks like William Parker, Matthew Shipp, David S. Ware and Zorn although she's has recently severed her ties with a lot of that scene citing the stifling amount of sexism.

The results have been largely breathtaking, as she now has had the freedom to pursue in every direction whether it's with '50s experimental tape artist Pauline Oliveros or contributing to a Yo La Tengo track. Releasing more and more music under her own name has been equally exciting.

"Home Cookin'" was the debut release for her and her husband's, multi-instrumentalist Assif Tsahar, independent label, Hopscotch. The recording was said to have been done in one day at the Knitting Factory. But it's hard to believe that it's a live recording. The sounds are crisp and full of dynamics.

Having said that, this record appears to be largely

improvised and it's easy to imagine how captivating this could be in a live setting. Ibarra is known not only for her explosive drumming but also her use of different types of percussion much of it reflecting her Asian heritage. Tsahar is equally diverse in his use of violin, flute and an assortment of other instruments.

There are seventeen tracks in all meaning that there isn't much filler anywhere. Ideas are attacked and concisely investigated and then it's time to move on. This no frills approach is probably not simply a reflection of Ibarra's past in the Houston hardcore scene of the '80s. But her relationship to the alternative rock world certainly has broadened her definitions of what is exploration and what is meandering.

Her most recent release is the "Songbird Suite" with her current trio with a special guest performance from electronic artist Ikue Mori. Now, I haven't really given this laptop music much of a chance. I wasn't very moved after one listen to "Labyrinth" but now I'm thinking maybe I should go back and rediscover it. Either way, within the context of this composition, Mori's contribution is fluid and not at all obtuse like I imagined it would be.

In fact, this is the opposite end of the spectrum for Ibarra. The more structured composition of this record is a great example of how a three piece all working in the same mindset can sound like an orchestra. As expected, the percussion is the key here. With cues and hues determined by the rhythms and beats, Ibarra leads the group through orchestrated soundscapes at times bringing to mind Sun Ra.

While the production is almost too "shimmering" at times as compared to "Home Cookin'" and it's direct approach, it does help create the meditative mantra to juxtapose the angularity of the music. Definitely lookin' forward to her next records.

(Tzadik, www.tzadik.com)

L

LAST OF THE JUANITAS "Time's Up" LP

I just saw these guys a few weeks back with the Fucking Champs and Drunkhorse. I'd heard some cool things about them. I didn't realize until that night that John who used to drum for Aminiature was in the band. I hadn't seen him since the Ear of the Dragon tour with them, J Church, Seam and Venus Cures All. Whatever happened to them?

A funny thing happened as the band were finishing their first song, the last few seconds of a Lakers / Kings playoff game wound down with the Kings victorious. Just as the band finished the last note, the buzzer sounded and the whole audience cheered. The band must have thought it was the most emphatic responses ever.

Last of the Juanitas do deserve that kind of response. With some really messed up arrangements comforted by three powerhouse players playing in an intense, verging

on pathological style, it's funny that the band often get compared to the Melvins. The heavy parts are heavy and the Melvins are sort of the yardstick for heavy (mostly because nobody knows who Harvey Milk were). But there's a bit more to this pie than just the crust.

San Diego as a concept is being maintained by a few great bands progressing and calculating in scientific fashion as if distortion and noise were mathematical philosophies that could be infinitely compounded. There are many different versions of this theory in practice. Hot Snakes are certainly a good example of one. Black Heart Procession would be another. Last of the Juanitas find their own wave of quantum roar. Not that this is math rock, but more like ontological noise rock with it's inexplicable interconnectedness. They just might be psychic.

Of course if you're not ready to make any attempt at finding higher meaning in interplay of three rockers having a night on the town, then the rock can still get ya going. I was almost taken aback at how rock this record was. Sometimes they are gonna challenge you to think (crazy "version" of Max Roach). Sometimes they pay the bills. (Wantage USA – www.wantageusa.com)

M

STEPHEN MALKMUS & THE JICKS "Pig Lib" CD

It's funny to me how everyone reviewing this record is sort of dancing around it, only half committing and half warning Malkmus about not making any more mistakes like his last "solo" record. Shit, Everett True was warning Malkmus about the danger of becoming Frank Black with some really odd comparisons between Pavement and the Pixies. Does he really think the Breeders did anything especially relevant? God help us. And why would anyone reference Prag Vec?

So I'll come out and say it. I don't care. I love this record. Hey, I like it better than the last two Pavement records and I loved those records. No doubt about it. It's a consistently good rock record with great pop moments, challenging arrangements and some excellent playing. Yeah, the band is great. I'm sure they really wish the records had just come out as The Jicks and not Stephen Malkmus... Maybe more people would have given them a break.

Think of 'em as a band and not as one man's solo record. That first album was a pretty solid debut. It wasn't "Slanted and Enchanted 2: Electric Boogaloo". That's not what the world needed anyway. The Jicks second album has them moving into more complex areas and as long as they can keep the melody somewhere in the frame, it's a captivating picture. (Matador Records)

MATMOS "Drug Opera" CD

Also known as "Matmos Live", this is a cool little self-released record by the boys who I guess now include Lesser as a full-time member. I think it came out in conjunction with a tour of Japan or something like that. It's mentioned in the Aquarius Records blurb but I don't know what I did with that.

If you aren't familiar with Matmos, these loveable electronic nerds are more than the guys who "did stuff" with Bjork. Historically, their records are incredibly dense exercises in sound-scape possibility and the violent urgency of a successfully improvisational performance. Oddly enough, I've also learned over the years that despite the libertarian approach to musical construction, they really get bent out of shape if you don't play by the rules while bowling. Ah, heighten the contradiction!

Oh, and these guys are nerds. Once I went over to Jay's house thinking there was a party or something. Turns out it was a "soldering" party. He and a few friends were having a party soldering electronic bits together to create new electronic thingies. I mean, I think that's pretty cool. But I'm a fucking nerd!

Their records and performances (I saw them aurally destroy Aquarius once at an in-store) challenge you with combines of organic and synthetic noise and sound. So, it could be argued that a studio recording could never really capture what they are trying to convey.

But I dig their two (is it just two) other albums. I think they are quite beautiful and focused. I think it shows a limitation and smallness in the field that they are continually compared to the self-indulgent meanderings of Oval and Autechre and other pointless, useless.

So, this record is a collection of live performances mostly from college radio which they in a small way pay tribute to as one of the last supported art forms in the country. Too bad so many college radio DJ's think of it as nothing but a resume entry for their future corporate music careers. Sad, sad, sad...

Since this is live, there isn't nearly as much layering as on their studio records out of necessity. But part of being a great improviser is the ability to adapt to anything. People always say, "it's not the guitar, it's the fingers." I guess you could substitute "guitar" for "sound forge" or something. Either way this record meditates in a few specific areas with at times bone rattling results.

Like all live records, this is something of a souvenir. Unlike most live records, this isn't just buying time before the next album. It's not static. It's effervescent. (Vague Terrain, mcess@prodigy.net)

MELT BANANA/THE LOCUST split 7"

It's the end of February and this is already probably one of the 10 best records of the year. Once you've gotten past the quasi-Lichtenstein via Mexican comic book art of the front cover and the Orange Julius colored vinyl, you'll find yourself listening to some of the most advanced hardcore and thrash imaginable. Actually, it's totally unimaginable. Three or four years ago, even with these bands already existing, I never could have predicted music like this from them or anyone else. I'm not sure I even know how to explain it other than to say it's great.

Of course, it's a challenge as well. That's part of what is

so brilliant about these two bands. They genuinely challenge the listener to expand their preconceived notions of punk rock and hardcore and, inadvertently, music. Okay, that sounds like a lot of bullshit. But I think it's true. I didn't buy this record to be entertained or to add to my collection.

Melt Banana are reaching out in a new direction this time around while maintaining the basic schematic. The addition of electronics and non-instrumental textures to an already abstract kind of music creates something even more devolved. It's almost as if this idea was floating around in the fields of ESP around the planet. One flash of it was planted in the gray matter of a Swedish straight edge band called Refused and became one thing. Another flash was deposited in the blood flow of Japanese noise thrash band called Melt Banana. Both times it lasted for just a flash and that seemed to be enough.

The Locust, on the other hand, is continually marching in seemingly random directions creating music that is certainly as expressive as it is aggro. Squeezing five songs onto their side, they manages to keep the lyrical ideas in real time encapsulating a fleeting thought pattern into a totally kinetic form of complex hardcore. Some people I know think of them as being sort of a metallic / moshcore band. I think this record will hopefully expand some minds.

(GSL, www.goldstandardlabs.com)

MEPHISTA "Black Narcissus" CD

I feel very fortunate that I was able to see Mephista perform live here in Austin. It's funny; this seemingly shy (or at least extremely restrained) trio of women would smile silently before each piece. Then they would dive into full improvisation with such voracity, I at times found myself leaning away in my seat. It was a very powerful performance. At the end of the set, Susie Ibarra, Ikue Mori and Sylvie Courvoisier stood shoulder to shoulder for a well-deserved bow. I swear, I thought they were summoning Mothra.

I was a little apprehensive about this record. Not so much because of the idea of three important female improvisers possibly ending up with a set of mundane music; but also because I have to admit to being a little nervous about the meeting between acoustic music and electronica. I'm certainly no expert in that area. But I know I haven't heard anything convincing. Usually it sounds like a more standard instrumental group with someone tinkering on a PC creating sounds that don't necessarily gel with or relate to the structure of the music.

With that in mind, this record is a major success. Not only do the three work together fluidly, but the result is unlike anything I've ever heard. I'm a big fan of Susie Ibarra's. She's the performer I'm most familiar with on this record. Her playing is tops here switching between bombastic runs at the tom toms with rapid-fire hi-hat work and metallic percussion shimmering and beautiful.

Courvoisier's piano is not as percussive as I was led to believe. She does play inside and out of standard tonal

structures and is able to make the transitions smoothly. Like some of Paul Bley's post-synth freak out, her playing mixes the familiar with the unfamiliar.

While I would hate to say that any one person is the "leader" of this group, Ikue Mori is inadvertently showcased seeing as her sounds are so fresh and surprising. Her ability to improvise with a generally contrived form is both intellectual and aggressive. Her hums, clicks, buzzes and whatnot compliment the other two while propelling the music forward into the unknown.

It's also worth noting that this record is beautifully recorded allowing for great contrast with the raw live performance. Mephista is not to be trifled with. (Tzadik Oracles)

MORRISON, VAN "Celebrities... At Their Worst Volume 3.1" CD
Hey, fuck y'all, I like Van Morrison. You probably would too if you just gave him a fucking chance. Yeah, right. You little rugrats get back to your fucking Orchid and International Noise Conspiracy and Blood Brothers and leave me with my "Astral Weeks"... Blah, blah, blah...

I'd heard that Van the Man had recorded a bunch of stuff back in the old days that was purposefully dreadful. The idea was that by recording a bunch of horrible, unreleasable stuff, he would be let out of his contract. At the time of this recording, he was obligated to Bang Records who in turn owed him tens of thousands of dollars.

This disc is a document of those 31 god-awful songs he recorded with this in mind. A lot of it is just totally half assed pop songs with no thought put into them like "Twist And Shake", "Shake And Roll", "Stomp And Scream" and "Scream and Holler". All these songs are in a row and are essentially the same thing interchanging the verbs. It's an interesting little mantra of disrespect.

The songs I think are really funny are the more mean-spirited ones that take aim at the label like "The Big Royalty Check", "Thirty Two", "Here Comes Dumb George", and "Dumb Dumb George". I know how you feel and I'm feeling your pain, Van.

What I'm trying to say is: this shit is classic!
(www.transparency.tv)

O

OMEGA TRIBE "Make Tea Not War" CD
The much-anticipated retrospective CD of Omega Tribe is finally here and delivers in a big way. All of the beloved tracks from their EP and LP are collected in chronological order to give some idea as to the band's thought process and musical evolution. Also included is the original (and I think superior) version of "Nature Wonder" similar to how it appeared on the second "Bullshit Detector" compilation.

For those unfamiliar, let me backtrack a bit. Don't go searching under google as you'll only come up with the meathead alterna-rock-poseur band that for some reason

adopted the same name. The real Omega Tribe were part of the late '70s / '80s anarcho punk scene in England. One of the most popular bands to come out of that scene, their records were known to chart well with their upbeat melodic music separating them from much of that scene.

This compilation shows how quickly a band can develop in a supportive scene. From great, though rudimentary Ramones-like riffs to great washes of pop music with a variety of influences, the music on this record isn't as static as many other reissues of this type. In fact, a lot of it still seems really fresh, cliché as that may seem.
(Rubber Bugger Discs – PO Box 357 – London SE19 1AD – UK)

OZZY OSBOURNE "Blizzard Of Ozz" CD
I'm not sure what to make of this to be honest. The original version of this is one of my favorite records of all time. You think you know me? You know nothing! I know a lot of people would like me to write this as if "Blizzard" were a guilty pleasure. It's not. I think this record is as fresh and as relevant as any punk record, any side of "Exile On Main Street", any Velvet Underground record.

I liked Black Sabbath as a kid. My Aunt (who hung out with bikers during the '60s as a teen) gave me her copies of "Black Sabbath" and "Masters Of Reality" when I was in grade school. I dug it. I was a rock kid in a world of disco and pop music. But Sabbath were just one of many bands I was into.

Having said that, I didn't necessarily expect anything from Ozzy's first solo record when it came out. I was too young to have the kind of false importance I put on things like an artist's legacy and talent, etc. But the first time I heard "Crazy Train" I knew it was something else.

Maybe I'm just being nostalgic. I hope not. I really believe that this is a great pop record that happens to be augmented by my favorite guitar playing on any record since Hendrix. Not only are the solos incredibly accomplished, they are done with such vitality and verve that you feel yourself smiling along with Randy Rhoads as he tears down the fret board not in some self-gratifying show of strength and dexterity. But by using his uncanny abilities he finds his own path and is ecstatic in sharing the gift. It's beautiful and as great as "Diary Of A Madman" was it just never soared as high despite much higher production values.

This new CD is great. You can't deny the songs or the original performances. The only real drawback is that Ozzy couldn't get the original rhythm section to agree to release it. So his current band had to go into the studio and rerecord the tracks. It's a bit weird. The bass sounds especially new school metal. It does detract. But the rest of the mastering is fantastic bringing out some of the guitar playing that was originally lost in the mud of a relatively low budget recording.
(Epic Records)

R

RADIGUE, ELIANE "Geelriandre – Arthesis" CD
For those unfamiliar with experimental electronic music, Eliane Radigue is one of the most respected figures in the forms sordid and fragile history. Born in Paris, she studied electroacoustic music techniques at RTF in the late '50s, which at the time was one of the only places to do so.

Her music, as is the case with these two recordings, is almost entirely composed for the ARP synth. The first piece, "Geelriandre" was first written in 1972 but wasn't recorded until 1979. Those "lost" years were spent becoming a Tibetan Buddhist. It's a meticulous meditation on space with the addition of a piano at times almost sounding influenced by the sound of meditation bowls. The pacing is at times excruciating ultimately resulting in a massive calming effect. If this post-enlightened, revamping of the piece is an attempt at catharsis, it's effective in a most subtle way. Very Buddhist.

The second piece, "Arthesis" was recorded in 1973, but is drastically different in sound. I guess if I had to use a more contemporary comparison, the whirling, Leslie-like soundwaves are not so far removed from some of the things Throbbing Gristle were doing in their most creative period. In particular, it reminds me of "Hamburger Lady" without the trite exposition.

This will not be most peoples cup of tea. Those drawn to the soothing mood of the first piece will be rejected by the challenging, distorted waves of the second and vice-versa. But it's fantastic in different ways and if you can transcend it, well, you'll feel at least a little enlightened.
(www.fringesrecordings.com)

ROSWELL RUDD "Broad Strokes" CD
I sort of keep expecting either this guy or Archie Shepp to really bust out one of these days and put together something as blasting as they did in the '60s. Maybe that's just wishful thinking. Even the collaboration between Rudd and Shepp, while totally enjoyable, was pretty restrained. It's reasonable to assume they don't have the chops they once had. But there are other ways of challenging yourself.

With Rudd, the new challenge is work outside of his field. His trombone style, especially in large group collaborations like Charlie Hayden's Liberation Music Orchestra or New York Eye And Ear Control, is so strong that it can often carry a melody on it's own no matter the competitive voices in the surrounding. One of the few musicians specializing in the trombone in the "free" or avant-garde scene, his uniquely almost barbed style is distinctive anywhere.

On this record, Rudd focuses on ballads, an area he's never been known to work in. The end result is a strange mixture of sounds ranging from total experimentation to almost smooth jazz. The recordings were made in several different studios with as many different groups and collaborators. The selection of music to cover ranges greatly from Herbie Nichols to Thelonious Monk to Elvis

Costello. Needless to say, there is quite a varied sound on this collection.

At the same time, it's a very modern feeling record. Not necessarily because of Sonic Youth's contribution to "Theme From Babe". But that he is acknowledging them and their contribution is generous and they seem to reciprocate with a respectful support role on the track. It's also interesting that Rudd name-drops Jennifer Jason Leigh in the liner notes when speaking to his cover of Costello's "Almost Blue". It's interesting to think that her tortured version of the song in her film "Georgia" might have been some inspiration for his almost funeral march-like version.

The playing on this record is also very fluid. The production is crisp and his horn jumps right out at you and isn't ever overshadowed by the occasional vocals even on the soulful "Stokey". Even his free improvisation with Sonic Youth is seamless. No easy outs here.
(Knitting Factory Records, www.knittingfactory.com)

S

SEA OF TOMBS s/t LP

Are you one of those people that thought the worst thing about Blue Cheer were the vocals? I've got an album for you. Instrumental '70s rock as played by emo-esque philistines? Not really.

Number one myth about Sea Of Tombs – It's a "jam" band. No way. There are no raging full on solos. Nobody takes turns blasting through verses over and over. There's some sort of structure on each song. There are directions and angles and decisions being made. The loose nature of a lot of the guitar playing is too unassuming and unconscious to be thought of as solo work. In fact, it's so, I don't know, "relaxed" that if I didn't like it so much I would say he's either a bad guitar player or a lazy motherfucker. He's neither really. His style of playing complements the music making for a broad sound pastiche. The noodley guitar playing is in itself a drone pattern as viewed under a microscope. It's Can... Sort of...

Number two myth about Sea Of Tombs – It's "retro" bullshit. While this record is full of lengthy quotations of other artists and there are more than enough references to other things, to call it retro would imply that they were neo-ists. I really can't think of a time that there was music quite like this. Instrumental, fuzz rock with sustained guitar meanderings? As a sidetrack maybe but not as a band's singular direction.

I mean, this record isn't supposed to last or anything. It's a good solid diversion and a fun oddity to distract you from all the boring middle of the road punk rock and hardcore and it's dulling effect.
(Gravity Records)

T

TELEVISION "Poor Circulation" CD

Are you a big Television fan? I mean a big, big fan? Are

you a huge Richard Hell fan? If not, TURN AROUND! GO BACK! WAIT ON DRY LAND! This is a collection of totally fucked recordings of Television from back in the days when Richard Hell plonked on the bass for them. The recordings are from two rehearsal tapes and a couple of live performances.

To get it out of the way, all of the shit you would expect from a bootleg record is realized here. The sound quality is pretty fucked. These probably weren't the band's greatest performances. They seem pretty damned loose. The practice stuff is barely complete.

But fuck it, you know? It's a fucking bootleg! What the fuck do you expect? "Dark Side Of The Moon"? This brief history of the band's incarnation features quite a few of Hell's songs that were never recorded. This original version of "Blank Generation" is also really fascinating. It's interesting to see how different guitar players approached that song. There's also an odd version of the Count Five's "Psychotic Reaction" recorded at Max's Kansas City.

It's also interesting from the early practice tapes how much more pronounced the Velvet Underground influence on them was. By the time they were thinking about "Marquee Moon" they must have had quite a bit of time to evolve.

Really cool packaging on this odd little CD of dubious origin. Lots of early photos of the band that I've never seen...

This record is a great document for nerds like me who can't stand the idea of anything Richard Hell or Television did going undocumented. It kills me to know that there really isn't a proper studio version of "Fuck Rock N Roll". So discs like this have to suffice. It just seems too sad. But then again, maybe the problem is me. Yeah, I thought so.

(Punk Vault)

U

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, THE "s/t" CD
Dorothy Moskowitz has one of the most alluring voices in the sordid history of psychedelic rock. The United States of America only ever released one record. If the world was a better place, this record would hold the same influence as the Velvet Underground or at least Syd Barrett. Instead, we're left with this one brilliant record from a band of totally untapped potential.

Behind the lead of experimental composer Joseph Byrd, the group could be seen as a contrived attempt to use the psych scene for his own ends. But in many ways, the groups contribution helped advance the musical movement and at least helped establish it's respectability several decades later under the scrutinizing reevaluation worshippers of Goldmine and Mojo love so much (It truly verges on revisionism at times).

So what's so great about this record? First of all, the band

is really storming. The songs range from "For the Benefit of Mr. Kite" type quirkiness (apparently not a strictly British infatuation) to brutal, fuzzed-out garage music. At any given moment, the songs can go over the edge to completely unstructured noise Terry Riley or "Metal Machine Music". No two songs sound the same, and yet it's totally cohesive. A lot of it is due to the beautiful tones of Moskowitz' voice. She's note perfect and vaguely raspy. You can't help but think that she was some totally foxy, quasi-Beatnik intellectual type. What would Julie Christy's character in "Billy Liar" sing like?
(Edsel Records)

V/A

V/A "Dynamite With A Laserbeam" LP

Queen are like one of my five favorite bands of all time, so I was a little wary of this tribute record. I mean, tributes suck for the most part. I don't know why they are so intriguing (and they really are). But it's always a totally unsatisfying affair.

I'm not sure why this comp is so enjoyable. Some of the versions don't really have any resemblance to the original versions. I'll assume that Bastard Noise had some deeper inspiration from "Sheer Heart Attack" in doing their abstract version of "Lily Of The Valley". It's cool! I dig it. And some are almost a little too tongue in cheek, as you would expect. But it's an almost entirely enjoyable record.

The Blood Brothers do a great "Under Pressure" and the Oath do a great "We Are The Champions" in similar fashion. The Locust are always great turning in the shortest song on the comp; a version of "Flash's Theme". Spacewurm also do a cool little e-rock version of "Vultan's Theme". Shit, I always thought of "The Game" and "Flash Gordon" as the end of the road for Queen. I may have to re-investigate.

Surprisingly, I think the best contribution might be from Weasel Walter doing an excruciating version of "Bohemian Rhapsody". Well, I don't know who Weasel Walter is, so maybe it's not surprising that the track is so good. Just waiting for the payoff.

There are some other cool moments (Melt Banana and the Convocation Of as expected) and some odd moments (Upsilon Acrux does a version of "Bicycle Race" that sounds just like "All-O-Gistics". Seriously, just keep saying things like "Thou shalt not commit laundry" while listening to it...). This is a really fun comp and I very, very, very rarely (and I'm sure you're the same) feel that way.
(Three One G – PO Box 178262 – San Diego, CA 92177)

FILM REVIEWS

FIONA (directed by Amos Kollek) DVD

Amos Kollek must be crazy. "Fiona" is a film not only about prostitutes and crack addicts. It was an entire supporting cast of the real deal. Not just extras, several of the main characters are actual prostitutes and crack addicts with much of the film shot in a NYC crack house / crash pad. This is about as heavy duty as you can get

without it being a documentary. Actually, this is beyond documentary because Kollek is no quiet observer. He's in there as a director working closely with the drug addicts and prostitutes. It's Dogma taken in a weird, dangerous and, inadvertently, titillating direction.

The story follows a young woman, Fiona (Anna Thomson) from her recollections of being sexually abused in a foster home to her adventures on the streets. The plot turns Oedipal as we meet her mother, who is a much more weathered prostitute working the same streets. Eventually, their paths meet and our streetwise Ophelia finally transcends her destiny by taking control of it.

Yeah, it's a simple plot. But the plot is really just a hanger with which a series of vignettes, both shocking and touching, are draped. Kollek's previous film, "Sue" (which also starred Anna Thomson), let him wear his influences on his sleeve as it clearly brings Cassavettes to mind. "Fiona" lets him take it to it's logical extent which, while most people will remember the grim moments, also allowed for some very real moments unlike anything you'll see at the multi-plex.
(Vanguard Cinema)

LADYFEST DOCUMENTARY PROGRAM

DON'T NEED YOU (directed by Kerri Koch)

LIVE AND LET RIDE: GIRL SKATEBOARDING (directed by Tara Cooper)

SAM, AGE 11 (directed by Elizabeth Skadden)

UNWRAPPED (directed by Ashley Nicole Cook and Mike Gomez)

HOT AND BOTHERED: FEMINIST PORNOGRAPHY (directed by Becky Goldberg)

Good ol' Ladyfest came through town a week ago and I have to say that I missed most of it. Sorry. I was working most of the time. All I could do was pat myself on the back for getting the video store I work at to make a donation. I also bid on some artwork at the silent auction (Why is it that all of my friends are so much artistically inclined than me? Maybe I should try more. Maybe I should just work on my piss poor grammar!). I won a grand total of zero paintings. Fuck!

I did, however, make it to the first film program of documentaries during the second night of the fest. No matter who it is – Asian, Gay and Lesbian, Jewish, documentary – when I go to a Film Festival's short program, I expect the worst. It's usually needle in the haystack work for me finding the few that I will really love hiding in the primordial ooze of young filmmaking.

Not so the case with Ladyfest TX! I found myself thoroughly enthralled by all the films regretting the loud groan I editorialized with when it was announced that it would be an uninterrupted two hour long program. Here's a small rundown of some of the highlights. I don't know if these kinds of films ever wind up where you live. But they're all worth seeking out in some way or another.

"Don't Need You" by Becky Goldberg is sort of the who, what, where and why for Ladyfest and Riot Grrrl. It's kind of like when you get your first job at Pizza Hut and they

make you watch a training video. But this is fun. All the usual suspects are here giving interviews from Kathleen Hannah, Corin Tucker and Madigan Shive (who has a great story about her mother's profession as a wrestler) to Ian MacKaye. Okay, maybe that's not the hugest leaps. But we're talking a collection of people who always give great interviews. It was cool seeing crazy footage of the first Bikini Kill show and Bratmobile at the first Ladyfest. Speaking of which, there's obviously a lot of Allison Wolfe in this movie, which is great. I love that girl and it's funny to see nerds I know up on the big screen.

"Live and Let Ride: Girl Skateboarding" by Tara Cooper was probably my favorite flick. It's totally fucking rad watching these bad-ass chicks skating and starting to get the respect they deserve. It's fucking cool. But some of the most amazing and affecting moments come from a young amateur named Pookie talking about being a really young girl learning to skate. More than any other film, you've gotta track this shit down.

"Sam, Age 11" by Elizabeth Skadden has some similar vibes to it and was also one of the real standouts. This great little film follows 11-year-old Samantha as she shoots her very first Super 8 film. Mixed with footage of her endeavors and a separately recorded interview is the actual footage from her film. It's completely expressionistic and beautiful. This is the kind of thing that would make Greta Snider proud.

"Unwrapped" by Ashley Nicole Cook and Mike Gomez is a hilarious film about a nudist group here in Austin. Not that the film in any way makes mean spirited fun of the subject matter – quite the opposite. The filmmakers embrace the nudist agenda and join in on the fun. Okay, it's not Erroll Morris. But it's great seeing the filmmakers becoming part of the story.

"Hot and Bothered: Feminist Pornography" by Becky Goldberg created a lot less controversy than some would have thought. There were a few groans from the prudes in the audience during some of the graphic sex stuff. But the biggest groans came from any footage of semen. It's funny. It reminded me of an article by Susie Bright about how many upper middle class feminists were mostly opposed to pornography because they thought sperm was "dirty" and "gross". They're happy to make lesbian porn as long as nobody got sperm on it. Pretty funny... Anyway, like most treatise pro and against on the subject, nobody really gets into the issue of fantasy versus reality in terms of power and staged violence. Everyone debating the subject should take a few days out of their busy schedule to read a little Foucault and Baudrillard. 'Nuff said.

There are many other interesting titles, all worth checking out. It seems like it would be cool if Ladyfest pooled all of their film resources and put out a "best of" DVD or video.

LEGEND OF RITA, THE (directed by Volker Schlöndorff) DVD

LOST HONOR OF KATHARINA BLUM, THE (directed by Volker Schlöndorff and Margarethe Von Trotta) DVD

I'm a big fan of Schlöndorff. I remember being deeply affected as a child watching "The Tin Drum" and as a teen I was equally horrified when I saw "The Lost Honor of Katharina Blum" for the first time.

Okay, so I was really primed to love "The Legend of Rita". And, yes, no surprise, I love this movie. Here's why:

First of all, it's an objective film about the European left in all its shapes and sizes. Rita is a member of a radical group of German urban guerillas somewhat based on the Baader-Meinhoff gang and somewhat based on the Hash Rebels. She kills a police officer, but unlike Western mainstream cinema, we still sympathize with her and identify with her struggle. She is aided by the East German Stasi, who see as normal people doing a job they believe in, rather than as the Stalinistic secret police we're told to believe they were. We see East Berlin as a difficult place to live. But not as the colorless, endless ghetto with bread lines that books and films have also told us. It's an objective film.

Second of all, it's a film where the main character is a woman driven by her ideological convictions AS WELL AS her loves and desires. If Hollywood made the film, unrequited love or some sort of sexual frustration would drive her. Her political convictions and dedication to leftist revolution are what give her strong character and is not her Achilles heel.

The film follows Rita as a young member of a radical group in '70s Berlin. While traveling back from Lebanon, a series of events leads her to make friends with the Stasi who aid her and her companions throughout their misadventures. After killing a cop during a police chase, she creates a new identity and lives a normal life in the East.

From there the film follows her life and the end of the Cold War (World War III). I know most of the world was celebrating Glasnost. But to me, it felt like such a huge failure. Now, I may be an anarchist and I may have the same problems many of you had with the Soviet Union. But the fall of communism still felt like defeat. And for revolutionaries around the world, including people like Rita many of whom were turned over to the invading right wing bureaucrats, it was a palpable defeat.

It's funny, but the recent Criterion DVD release of "The Lost Honor of Katharina Blum" gives it a whole new perspective. Next to "The Legend of Rita", "Lost Honor" is almost like "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead". But in this case, it's dead serious.

Katharina Blum is a normal German woman who has a one-night state with a man she meets at a party. Later, she finds out that he is an anarchist and part of a Baader-Meinhoff-type gang; the group Rita from "Legend of Rita" is supposed to be a member of.

Responding to the activities of German urban guerillas, there is a national dragnet to hunt them down. Blum is arrested and gets caught up in the hunt, revealing a myopic government at it's most abusive. Equally revealing

is the insidious nature of the media and it's role in repression. You can't help but get a chill watching it not because you can't believe it ever happened. But because you can't believe it happens all the time. Life in America is a lot like Katharina Blum's for many people.

Schlöndorff is an intellectual. Both of these films are great reflections of that. They're smart, challenging while being well paced and lithe. "Lost Honor" marked the directorial debut of Margarethe Von Trotta (in some ways a protégé of Schlöndorff's not to mention lover) who would go on to great things including "Rosa Luxembourg".

Both DVDs come with great extras. "The Legend of Rita" comes with a fantastic commentary track from the director. "The Lost Honor of Katharina Blum" comes with recent interviews with the directors as well as excerpts from a documentary on the author, Heinrich Böll. (Kino Video – www.kino.com) (The Criterion Collection – www.criterionco.com)

SUN RA ARKESTRA – Live at the Palomino DVD
Well, this was supposed to be the first in a 10 part series. But it looks like someone put the kibosh on it as is usually the case with Sun Ra releases of dubious origin. I guess I should be happy that any Sun Ra performance is on DVD at all.

The Palomino was a club in the Valley. I kind of remember it being the home for all kinds of Downey Mildew type bands. But I could be wrong. This performance is from '88, so I was there in LA at the time. But I was probably not seeing anything that wasn't either Savage Republic or raging hardcore at the time. Oh, the impetuosity of youth...

So this one camera, straight off the video, DVD is as close as I'll ever get to seeing Sun Ra. And it is really great. The sound is decent (despite a roaring loud guitar at some points) and the cameraperson is able to follow the action as well as can be expected. Are there any totally bad Arkestra performances? There are so many great players that at any given time, someone can jump up and do something terrific. It's so random as to who is going to be hot (if not everyone) that it's no wonder there are so many rabid collectors of Sun Ra shows.

In addition to the Palomino show is a great duet with Don Cherry. I don't remember ever hearing about any of this stuff. But it's great. Sun Ra at the keys and Cherry on some crappy little piece of plastic making it sound like something "otherworldly", a term I vow to stop using.

The disc ends with a sympathetic interview with Sun Ra allowing him to pontificate in his most verbose, equal parts free association and abstract dogma. (Transparency – PO Box 81-1821 – Los Angeles, CA 90081)



NEAT NEAT NEAT

Be a man can a mystery man

Be a doll be a baby doll

It can't be fun not anyway

It can't be found no way at all

A distant man can't sympathize

He can't uphold his distant laws

Due to form on that today

I got a feeling then I hear this call

No crime if there ain't no law

No more cops left to mess you around

No more dreams of mystery chords

No more sight to bring you down

I got a crazy got a thought in my mind

My mind's on when she falls asleep

Feelin' fine in her restless time

Then these words upon me creep

I said Neat Neat Neat

She can't afford a cannon

Neat Neat Neat

She can't afford a gun at all

Neat Neat Neat

She can't afford a cannon

Neat Neat Neat

She ain't got no name to call

Neat Neat Neat